

# *Samui*

## DINING GUIDE

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RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS ON SAMUI



Welcome  
to  
Samui



Welcome to a

# "Gourmet's Paradise"

Samui is labeled 'paradise' not only for its tropical beaches and friendly people. Lately it's become known for the culinary excellence you'll find here too.

The *Samui Culinary Circle* (SCC) is an organization of food and beverage professionals working here. Our aim is to continually improve the quality and standard of cuisine & service offered on the island.

And we've recently been fortunate in having even more exceptional chefs arrive on the island, sharing their extraordinary culinary skills. Happily for us, the vast range of high-quality, fresh ingredients available here has attracted these gastronomic masters. Tropical fruits & vegetables, free-range meats & poultry, boundless varieties of fish, seafood and crustaceans, Thai herbs & seasonings, plus a liberal supply of ancient cooking secrets combine to make Samui a culinary treasure chest for the creative chef.

But, which restaurants are the best? After picking the wrong one, and eating a bad meal in poor surroundings, it's too late to start the evening again.

The *Samui Dining Guide* is a compilation of restaurant reviews consisting entirely of the ones we feel are worthy of recommendation. This should help you through the culinary minefield – ensuring that each time you eat out you'll have an enjoyable experience.

Bon Appétit!



Peter James  
President – Samui Culinary Circle



# Index to the recommended Restaurants

<b>Baan Chantra</b> Royal Thai Cuisine .....	4
<b>Baan Thai</b> Thai & International Cuisine .....	6
<b>Betelnut</b> Californian-Thai Fusion Cuisine .....	8
<b>Big John Seafood</b> Seafood & Thai Cuisine .....	10
<b>Budsaba</b> Thai & International Cuisine .....	12
<b>Captain Kirk</b> Thai, Seafood and International Cuisine .....	14
<b>Chef Chom's</b> Thai Cuisine .....	16
<b>Chez Andy</b> Steaks & International Cuisine .....	18
<b>Churrasco Steak House</b> Steaks & International Cuisine .....	20
<b>Colibri</b> BBQ & International Cuisine .....	22
<b>Flamingo</b> French Cuisine .....	24
<b>Hagi</b> Japanese Cuisine .....	26
<b>Jungle Park Restaurant</b> French, Thai & Vegetarian Cuisine .....	28
<b>La Brasserie</b> International & Thai Cuisine .....	30
<b>La Taverna</b> Italian Cuisine .....	32
<b>Laguna Terrace</b> International & Thai Cuisine .....	34
<b>Meranté Restaurant</b> International, Thai & Seafood Cuisine .....	36
<b>Noori India</b> Indian Cuisine .....	38
<b>Oriental Gallery</b> Thai & International Cuisine .....	40





<b>Osteria</b>	
Italian Cuisine . . . . .	42
<b>Panviman</b>	
International & Thai Cuisine . . . . .	44
<b>Pisces '99</b>	
Thai, International & Seafood Cuisine . . . . .	46
<b>Poppies</b>	
International & Thai Cuisine . . . . .	48
<b>Red Snapper</b>	
Tex - Mex Cuisine . . . . .	50
<b>Reef Café</b>	
Thai, International and Fusion Cuisine . . . . .	52
<b>Ruean Sai Lom</b>	
Thai, Seafood & International Cuisine . . . . .	54
<b>Sala Thai</b>	
Royal Thai Cuisine . . . . .	56
<b>Samui Seafood</b>	
Seafood, International & Thai Cuisine . . . . .	58
<b>SeaQuest Samui</b>	
French, Seafood & International Cuisine . . . . .	60
<b>Tamarind</b>	
Pacific-rim with Asian-influence Cuisine . . . . .	62
<b>The Captain's Choice</b>	
Italian & Thai Cuisine . . . . .	64
<b>The Mangrove</b>	
French Cuisine . . . . .	66
<b>Upstairs</b>	
International Cuisine . . . . .	68
<b>Vecchia Napoli</b>	
Italian Cuisine . . . . .	70
<b>Zico's</b>	
Brazilian Cuisine . . . . .	72
<b>SITCA</b>	
Thai cooking school . . . . .	74

# Royal Thai Cuisine at Baan Chantra



It's not everyday you get the chance to eat like a king – quite literally! Up until 40 years ago, Royal Thai Cuisine was prepared exclusively for the Thai Royal family. Nobody else was allowed to make it, or eat it. And even now, few restaurants have the capability or the expertise in creating this ancient culinary art/cuisine. In fact, there're precious few places on Samui where it's possible to enjoy this long-hidden style of cooking. And one that's highly recommended is *Le Royal Meridien's* Thai restaurant – *Baan Chantra*.

The resort is in Baan Taling Ngam, on the opposite side of the island to Chaweng, so it meant a 30 kilometer journey. We parked the car, and within 2 minutes, an electric buggy – golf style – arrived and whisked us up the steep hill to the restaurant. And what a beautiful building it is too. Traditional Thai-styled in the finest teak, it's as attractive a restaurant as you'll find on Samui. Originally designed as a luxury residence, it commands a breathtaking view across the Gulf Of Siam to the mainland beyond.

And as it was 6:30 pm, we were rewarded for making the journey with a spectacular sunset that filled the whole sky. Yellows, golds, crimsons followed by violets, purples and blues were all reflected onto the glasslike sea below, creating a perfect backdrop for enjoying an early cocktail.

*Baan Chantra*, or House of the Moon, is on the first floor, so we ascended the highly polished wooden staircase before choosing a table on the outside terrace. There's seating for 12 out here; a further 12 seats at western tables inside, with room for 18 more at the low, Thai-style tables at the back, where you sit on cushions. The décor here is impeccable, and it's evident that enormous attention has been paid to every minute detail.

Each table has a fragrant garland laid across it. There are aromatic flowers floating in dishes. Candles flicker in glass lanterns. The waitresses are immaculate



in their stunning traditional costumes, and then there's the entertainment. Throughout the evening there are wonderful displays of Thai dancing accompanied by the lilting sounds of traditional Thai music. Restaurants don't get any better than this!

The majority of people eating at Baan Chantra are first timers to Royal Thai Cuisine, so it only provides set menus. This way, you get to taste many small portions of a wide range of dishes. Every day there are 2 set menus available out of a total of 16, so if you wanted to go back and try a different meal another day, you'd get a fresh one.

"... and restaurants don't get any better than this!"

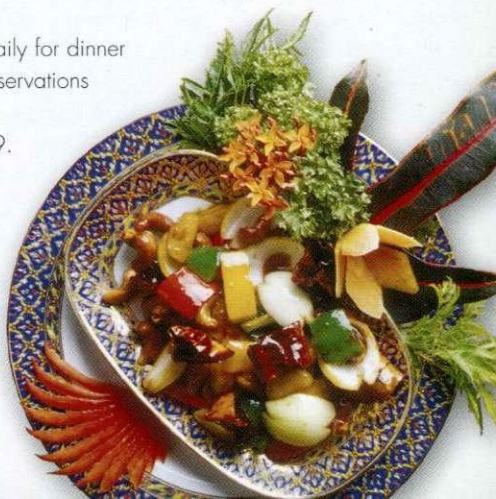
The menus are named after different Thai flowers & fruit, and my friend and I both chose the '*Pruksa*' menu. And this is what we got: *Laab Gai* – a spicy minced chicken salad; *Chor Mung* – steamed minced pork, chicken satay, and a prawn skewer; *Tom Jued Look Rook* – clear vegetable soup with chicken, served in a coconut; *Gaeng Kiew Waan Nuea* – green curry with beef; *Pla Ta Krai* – deep fried sea bass with lemongrass sauce; *Pad Pak Benjarong* – stir-fried vegetables with chicken and prawns; *Khow Suay* – steamed rice; and finally the *Royal Thai Dessert* – with fresh fruit, kaffir lime-flavoured ice cream in a papaya carving.

To accurately describe the way the food was presented would be impossible. Each and every dish was served in the world-famous Benjarong chinaware. And each dish was a miniature work of art in its own right. The vegetables were carved into all sorts of beautiful shapes. Prawns had been transformed into small chicks, with the aid of mashed potato and small red chillies. Nothing was untouched by the hand of an artist.

And then there's the taste. Well, although most of the dishes go by the same names as the ones I've been eating for years, they are remarkably different in taste. Apparently, extra ingredients are added to the normal recipes, which create this extraordinarily unique cuisine. But is it any good? Absolutely superb would be a better description!

The whole experience of going to Le Royal Meridien and trying Royal Thai Cuisine was marvelous. One that can be thoroughly recommended.

Baan Chantra is open daily for dinner (except Tuesdays). For reservations and further information, telephone 0 7742 3019.



# A Special Thai Night at Baan Thai



Germans are renowned for their precision and order. The British for their reserved manner. Italians for their Latin temperament. And of course the Japanese for their inscrutability. But when you think of Thais, the word 'hospitality' immediately springs to mind. When it comes to taking care of people, they are the world's leaders.

And what better place to experience this national trait, than in a Thai restaurant. One that enjoys a reputation for having warm and friendly staff. Where *nothing* is too much trouble. And their only consideration is the satisfaction of their diners.

I'd been told that the *Baan Thai Food Garden & Antique House Restaurant* in Chaweng was just such a place, but I wasn't going to take anyone else's word for it! So I took my wife along there one night to experience it for ourselves.

Baan Thai is on the Chaweng Beach Road, in front of *Chaweng Villa Beach Resort*, and next to *Chaweng Regent Beach Resort* – so it's pretty central, and finding it was not a problem. And the first thing I noticed was the beautiful old Thai roofs of the restaurant, floodlit against the dark night sky. So warm and inviting.

Our first contact with the staff was at the entrance, where 2 traditionally dressed Thai girls were offering free samples of the food to passers by. And judging by the amount of people who came into the restaurant after having a little taste, it must be good!

Baan Thai is split into several parts. We chose the courtyard-style garden area that seats 50. There's also a covered interior section for up to 70, and finally there're 2 large salas that can each accommodate a party of 8. It's all extremely well furnished and attractively lit, creating a comfortable, relaxed air. The main focal point is a stage with a colourful backdrop of mythical Thai characters. Its purpose became apparent very quickly.



Every night there is a traditional Thai dancing show that starts at 7:45 pm and lasts about an hour and a half. The costumes are incredibly beautiful and with over a hundred routines in their repertoire, they are never boring. In fact, if you saw the show every night for a month, you'd never see the same thing twice!

But we were here to sample more than just the hospitality and the entertainment; we were here to try the food too. And although they serve international dishes, we wanted to keep the evening a Thai affair, so we chose from the large selection of Thai cuisine. The authentically uniformed waiter politely assured us that all the traditional Thai recipes are strictly adhered to, ensuring that we would get *exactly* what we were expecting.

"... and so attractively lit, creating a comfortable, relaxed air."

Thai style, we chose several starters, which we shared: *Thod Mun Goong* – deep fried shrimp cakes served with a sweet chili sauce; *Gai Manao* – roasted chicken lightly seasoned in a spicy lemon sauce; and *Hor Mok Pla* – steamed fish curry served on a local hot plate. I found them all cooked to perfection, and my Thai wife was equally impressed and she *really* knows.

For the main course, we ordered a *Phanang Curry* – sautéed chicken in a thick curry & coconut milk sauce, and the most famous of all Thai dishes, *Tom Yum* – spicy seafood soup with mushrooms, lemongrass & lemon juice. I've eaten both these dishes on numerous occasions and I can honestly say that these were amongst the best I've had! And the waiter was right, they were just how I'd expected them to be.

We finished the meal with 2 refreshing desserts: *Coconut Boat* – fruit salad with coconut ice cream served in a fresh coconut, and *Paradise Island* – again fruit salad, but this time with vanilla ice cream, served in half a pineapple as a bowl. Mmmm, just the thing after spicy Thai food.

So, did Baan Thai come up to our expectations for their hospitality? They sure did, but they exceeded our expectations of their food!

The restaurant is open every day from 4 – 12 pm (last orders at 11pm).

For reservations and further information,  
telephone 0 7723 1123 or  
0 7723 1322-8



# Californiathai Fusion Food at Betelnut



How often do you get to eat in the restaurant of an internationally renowned chef? Where the chef personally prepares every dish? And serves as many of the dishes as time permits? Who takes a personal delight in seeing you enjoy every morsel? And makes it his business to ensure your total dining satisfaction?

If the answer to this multi-question is 'seldom', then follow the journey that I took recently when I visited one of Chaweng's best restaurants – *Betelnut*.

It's not on the beach. Neither is it smack-bang in the middle of the busiest part of town. But it is at the far end of a smart street just over the road from Chaweng's famous *Central Samui Beach Resort*. There're no blaring stereos here – blasting their noise over from neighbouring bars. No constant 'beepbeep' from trawling taxis. Not a grain of dust flying onto your plate from the infamous *Chaweng Beach Road*.

But what there is, are comfortable surrounds, seating for 28, soft lighting and mood-inducing music. The perfect backdrop for a dining adventure. Add to that some of the most attentive serving staff you'll find on the island, and then it's all down to the chef – and his cooking!

*Jeffrey Lord* is an exuberant character. A larger-than-life personality with a zest for living, and for the great love of his life – cooking (he's been in the restaurant business now for over 30 years!). A native Californian, he learned many of his culinary skills in *San Francisco* before continuing his training in *Italy*, *France*, *Japan* and *China*. Jeffrey's been on Samui now for eight years. He came initially to be the head chef at *Poppies* (one of Samui's top resort restaurants). There his popularity grew, as local gourmets visited and were seduced by his unique blend of cooking styles. After being there for two years he made the break, and opened his own restaurant – *Betelnut*.

As an indication of just how deep Jeffrey's love affair with food goes – he



visits the local markets 2, 3, and sometimes 4 times a day. Always looking for those special ingredients that will breathe life into yet another creation. Always seeking the freshest, quality produce available.

The menu itself is small, but there's so much to take the eye. And it changes on a regular basis. If you can't see anything at all that you'd really like (which is highly unlikely), Jeffrey will conjure up something especially for you. Now you don't get that sort of attention everywhere.

"... the menu itself is small, but there's so much to take the eye. And it changes on a regular basis."

If pinned down to accurately describe his style of cooking, I'd say it was Western with a heavy Asian influence, creative and innovative. For instance the *Crispy Soft Shell Crabs* with mango and papaya salad gives the taste buds lots of different flavours to appreciate, successfully blending seafood with fruit. Then there's the *Blackened King Mackerel* with Samui salsa and kao yam. Again mixing assorted styles on the same plate and producing an unexpected winner.

The *New Zealand Lamb Tenders* with massaman curry is also deserving of a special mention too. It's succulent, aromatic and extraordinarily tasty.

All the desserts are homemade, and the *Lemon Pudding Cake* in particular, with cream and wild mountain honey, and *The Chocolate to Die For*, would find a place amongst anybody's favourite recipes.

Nothing served here can be accused of being boring. Every single dish is original, inventive, and above all else – spectacularly delicious. The presentation is superb – Jeffrey makes sure that your eyes have a feast too, before your mouth does!

Interestingly, it was Jeffrey's initial suggestion that Samui needed a restaurant guide that eventually resulted in this publication!

Betelnut isn't easy to find, located as it is in a side street. But the rewards of discovery are high – like for any treasure!

Telephone 0 7741 3370  
for reservations and  
further information.



# Sunsets, Music & Fun at Big John Seafood



Combine fun and magnificent sunsets with live entertainment. Mix in superb service by smart, uniformed staff. Add some of the tastiest food to be found on the island. And finally stir together with incredibly reasonable prices.

They're the ingredients needed for that elusive 'perfect recipe' of a restaurant here on Samui. And finding them individually isn't a problem. But is there anywhere that has them all together? Serving up that sought-after dish of a great meal out?

Well apparently one such place is over the other side of the island from the major resort areas, on the road towards the car ferry (it's sign-posted and impossible to miss). The restaurant also offers a free pick-up and delivery service within a 10-kilometre radius, and very reasonable taxi rates to places further afield, like Chaweng, Lamai and Maenam.

*Big John Seafood* is as much a part of Samui as *Big Buddha* and the *Grandfather and Grandmother Rocks*. Its reputation remains unblemished – so far! But would I find any faults when I made my visit? We shall see...

It's easy to find. Even at night. But in order to be there in time for witnessing a 'Samui Sunset', my wife and I arrived about 6:00 pm (it's open from 7:00 am – 11:00 pm). And we weren't disappointed.

As soon as we pulled into the car park, a smiling waitress greeted us before leading the way towards the large restaurant building. There's seating for 100 here, but we passed through it, and on to the beachside terrace where there's more than enough room for a further 50. Cool sea breezes, lush tropical vegetation with orchids everywhere, and a panoramic view of a perfect beach. It seemed just the right location for enjoying a pre-dinner cocktail – so that's exactly what we did!

• And then the sky began its evening light-show. Well-rehearsed but never the same 2 days in a row. Reds, oranges and yellows, painted in stripes and



swirls. But what makes it so special *here* is that it's all reflected into the bay, glowing onto anything and everything around. Wonderful!

Our waitress for the evening was a charming girl – *Khun Tik* – who swiftly arrived with our menus (there's a German version too), and it immediately became apparent that there's no shortage of choice!

There are whole sections for seafood, Thai and international food, and a quick glance told me that it wasn't just the well-known favourite dishes either. There were many local specials too.

"... there's lush tropical vegetation with orchids everywhere, plus a panoramic view of a perfect beach."

My mouth began watering, just reading through the menu, so we quickly ordered our starters: *Thod Man Kung* – deep-fried shrimp balls, and *Plamuk Chub Pang Thod* – deep-fried squid, both served with spice and plum sauces. Tik was back with our food in what seemed like seconds. Mmm, so fresh, so crispy, and so, so tasty!

At 7:00 pm, the entertainment started (it goes on till 11:00 pm). Consisting of *Khun Tong* on the keyboards and *Khun Joe* on the microphone, the music was extremely professional. They played all the favourite international songs from the 60's to the 90's, and were joined at times by *Khun Maeow* (owner/manager of the restaurant) – herself an excellent vocalist. And it's not unusual for fellow guests to also get up on stage giving their own rendition of popular songs.

But let's get back to the food! For the main course, I was tempted to try the *Steak Big John* for only 180 Baht. But my wife wanted to have the *Seafood Basket* – with lobster, crabs, king prawns, mussels, fish and squid – and that meant sharing. And when it arrived, it looked like we could – with a few other tables too! Each item was cooked to perfection – without exception. And the presentation? 10 out of 10.

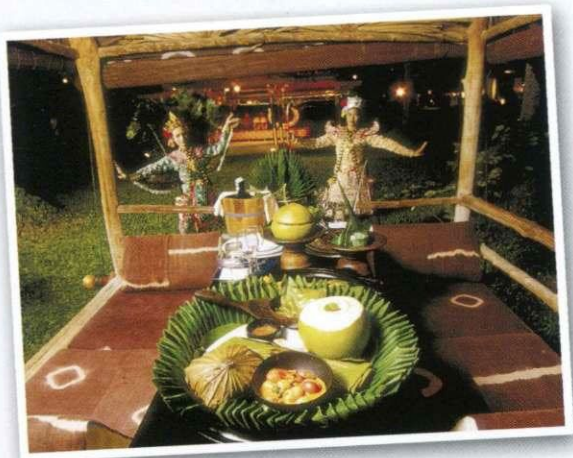
With absolutely *no* room left for desserts, we ordered a *Tiramisu* and a *Chocolate Mousse*. And ate them with equal pleasure.

They've got the right ingredients at Big John Seafood. And the right recipe. But most importantly – they've cooked the whole thing to perfection!

For reservations, pick-up service  
or further information,  
telephone 0 7742 3025,  
0 7742 3186.



# Traditional Thai Dining at Budsaba



There's nothing wrong with mass production. And there's a certain comfort in familiarity. But it's hard to beat the excitement you feel when you come across something that is totally *different*. Unique to itself. Such as *Budsaba*.

Although part of a contemporary-designed hotel – *Muang Kulaypan*, Budsaba is as traditional a Thai restaurant as you'll find on Samui. But does that necessarily mean it's any good? I'd heard many favourable reports about the place, and being a lover of Thai food, decided to take a friend there and find out for myself.

It's located at the northern end of Chaweng Beach, immediately after *Amari Palm Reef*. Far enough away from the centre of town to be peaceful, yet near enough to be within a ten-minute stroll of *Starbucks Coffee*.

Budsaba itself is placed in an idyllic spot directly on the beach. One hundred year old coconut trees and lapping waves frame the 28-seater restaurant building. But I found most of the diners outside. And that is where *this* restaurant is totally different!

Placed along the beachfront are 10 authentic Thai salas (roofed, wooden, open air, mini rooms on stilts). Nine of them can each seat 4-5 persons, and the tenth can accommodate up to 14. And they're spaciouly separated, ensuring no overheard conversations. We left our shoes on the floor outside the sala and stepped up into our 'personal restaurant'. It's not Thai custom to use chairs when eating in salas, so we sat on the comfortable cushions provided. The tables are barely a foot high, so everything was on a level again.

The feeling inside the sala is very private already, but if you want to make



it even more intimate, there are batik screens on each side that can be lowered. These are also handy should the sea breezes get a bit too strong. \*

A saronged waitress instantly appeared with the menu and asked us to ring an ornate silver bell when we were ready to make our order – what a nice touch! The menu does include an international & Chinese selection, and there's even a live seafood aquarium where you can choose your own dinner! But we were here to totally immerse ourselves in Thailand, so we chose only Thai dishes. Starting with a delicious entrée – *Poo Tja*.

This extraordinarily tasty dish, which consists of crabmeat mixed with vegetables and fried in a crab sauce, was so plentiful, it could easily be ordered as a main course. But we needed to sample more!

“... and we left our shoes on the floor outside the sala and stepped up into our ‘personal restaurant’.”

For the main course we ordered *Luam Mit Talay Pao* – a mixed selection of seafood including squid, fish, crab and prawns, and the house speciality, *Massaman Gai* – chicken massaman with potatoes, shallots and peanuts. As with the starters, each dish was cooked to perfection, and attractively served too.

Wine lovers should note that although Thailand does produce wine, it's not to the standard acceptable to many a trained palette – which is why Budsaba only serves the finest quality wines from France, Italy, Australia and Chile.

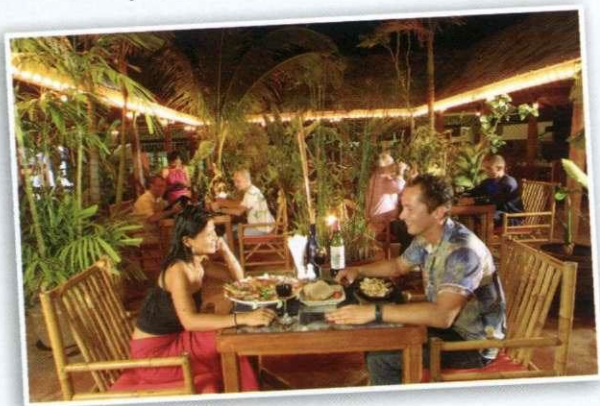
And just as our dessert *Kanom Thai*, an assortment of local, coconut-based, sweet delicacies arrived, so did the entertainment. We sat enthralled for the next hour as authentically-costumed Thai girls performed regional Thai dances (Southern-style Tuesdays, Northern-style Thursdays, & Central-style Saturdays – while on Sundays there's a fascinating staged play depicting the legend of *Inao* – the central theme of Muang Kulaypan). This to the sounds of excellent musicians playing their traditional Thai instruments. A perfect finale to a unique evening!

Altogether, Budsaba offers an unforgettable Thai experience – and delivers in style!

Telephone 0 7742 2305 for further information and reservations (which are definitely advisable).



# The Choice is Yours at Captain Kirk



They say you're '*spoilt for choice*' when you've plenty of options. But don't they really mean '*blessed with choice*'? Especially when talking about restaurants offering many alternatives.

Well, variety certainly is the '*spice of life*' at Captain Kirk restaurant. This place is quite *different* from the rest of the pack. To begin with, although it's in the heart of Chaweng – above the landmark Sport Stadium clothing outlet on busy Chaweng Beach Road, opposite Top-To-Toe Beauty Day Spa – it's almost invisible from the road, unless you're looking up!

This 50-seat, roof-garden restaurant offers great opportunities for people-watching – without *them* seeing you! And the 10-metre street frontage allows you to do just that, in style.

Or would you prefer a romantic dinner for two, watching the sun setting across the lake? Well Captain Kirk can offer that too, if you go to the other side of the restaurant, away from the road.

How about being inside, if the weather's not too good? Yes, you've guessed it, there's also a specially enclosed interior. And with Aztec-style hand-painted walls (it's actually a South African design), and an amazing bamboo ceiling, you're in yet *another* world. Finally, there's the roof-garden itself, with its forest of pot-plants and flowers. And being up above the hustle-bustle of the street has other benefits too, like cool sea breezes. But you get *them* wherever you sit!

Captain Kirk is full of novel design touches, such as the 10-metre long fishpond that runs like an aquaduct along the street-facing wall. And then there're the glass-topped tables, encasing fascinating collections of memorabilia, gathered by the restaurant's Belgian owner – Gillou Leroy – on some of his many travels around the world. And you'll find a brilliant display of postcards and photos in a most unlikely place – the bathroom. Definitely worth taking a visit, whether you need to go or not!

And the choices don't stop after you've decided where to sit. The menu gives



you lots more decisions to make too. There's especially detuned Thai cuisine, seafood and also a good selection of international fare with a Belgian flare, making it difficult picking out special recommendations when it *all* tastes so good.

Both the *Baked Seafood* with garlic-butter sauce, served on a hot-iron, and the *Fresh Tuna* marinated with olive-oil and lemon – *Japanese-style* – are particularly delicious starters, and will get your taste buds well-prepared for the main course.

The *Mixed Seafood on the Grill* – comprising of a fresh collection of crab, tiger & king prawn, squid, white snapper and barracuda, with French fries or baked potatoes and Bearnaise sauce – is superb. And whether you order it internationally-prepared or opt for the spicy Thai version, one thing is for sure, and that is you'll have a super-large portion, as with *all* the dishes served here.

“... or would you prefer a romantic dinner for two, watching the sun setting across the lake?”

Another main course worthy of an extra-special mention is the *Breast of Duck* with cinnamon, served with *twelve* mixed vegetables. Again there's more than enough, but you'll find it hard leaving any!

There are many excellent desserts too, and the *Ice-cream Nougat* with caramelised cashew nuts & strawberry coulis will tempt even the strictest weight-watcher! It is as good as it sounds, if not better.

And it's decision time again when you choose a wine to complement the delicious food. Whether to go for a *French, Australian, Italian* or *Chilean*? The bottles are incredibly inexpensive at Captain Kirk, with prices at little more than cost, *and* there's a good selection too.

In fact, nothing's expensive here at all. Even the beef and lamb dishes, with meat especially imported from *Australia* and *New Zealand* respectively, are very reasonably priced.

And as if there aren't enough choices already, Gillou is constantly making new additions to the menu; a few more starters here, a couple of desserts there. That's when he's not putting his considerable design talents to work on other restaurant features, giving you even more options for where to sit.

At Captain Kirk, you're spoilt *with* choice, and definitely blessed with it!

The restaurant is open from 5:00 pm until late. For further information, telephone 0 1270 5376.



# World-class Cuisine at Chef Chom's



Talk about going back to nature, and most people imagine the very bare necessities of life. Basic living conditions. Lack of modern conveniences. And, of course, little choice when it comes to food. But then again, most people haven't been to *The Tong sai Bay*!

Things are a little bit different here. When they designed this resort, the owners had two things in mind. Firstly, keeping the area as natural as possible, by blending the buildings into the hillside (not one tree was felled). And secondly, providing the utmost luxury – the stuff that dreams are made of. No other resort on Samui has its very own bay, and no other hotel can boast having a secluded *outdoor bath* for every guest!

But the luxury we're concerned with is in the food department. For we recently made the 15-minute journey from Chaweng to Tong sai Bay, to visit one of The Tong sai Bay's *three* restaurants – Chef Chom's.

The road to the resort is well sign-posted, whether you're approaching from Big Buddha or Choeng Mon. And it feels really adventurous, just like being *Indiana Jones*, driving through the lush tropical countryside on our way to dinner. We set out early, wanting to travel in daylight, and were rewarded with one of Samui's many spectacular sunsets.

So, by the time we'd arrived, we had an opportunity to see Tong sai Bay in all its colourful glory. And enjoy a cocktail or two on the massive deck area of Chef Chom's. The deck, or the '*plaza*' (as they call it), commands a marvelous view of the whole bay, and is surrounded by the Sardinian-styled buildings of the resort. It's been built around the coconut trees, giving a very natural feel to the restaurant.

• There's room for hundreds out here, but has seating for only 50. So there's no chance of being overheard during a private *tête à tête*! There's further



seating for 80 in the restaurant's attractive interior sections, both upper and lower. But as it was such a lovely clear evening, we decided to stay outside on the plaza.

Chef Chom's is the resort's Thai restaurant, which gave me the opportunity of introducing my overseas guest to the native cuisine. The menu is huge, with a wide selection in every category. There are spicy Thai salads, soups, grills, fresh seafood, curries, stir-fried, deep-fried, and even a Chinese-Thai section.

"... and it feels really adventurous,  
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tropical countryside on our way to dinner."

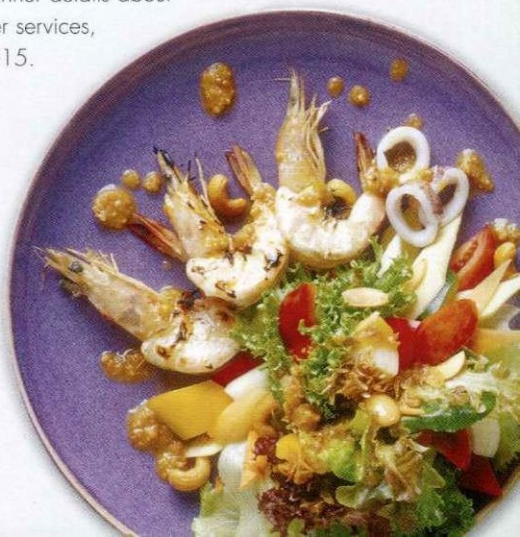
As is the Thai custom, known as 'Samrub', we selected several dishes that we then shared. This is a great way for everyone at a table to have a taste of everything served. I don't know why we don't do it like this in the West! We chose the *Yam* – grilled aubergine stuffed with minced pork with a hot and spicy salad; *King Prawns* in Panaeng curry sauce; *Stir-fried Beef Fillet* with holy basil leaves and chili sauce; *Fish Fillet* in tamarind flavoured soup; *Deep-fried Golden Pouch of chopped prawns*; and *Crabmeat* with a coconut cream dip.

Well, it would be difficult to single out any one of the dishes as being the best. They were all outstanding! The service – superb, the presentation – excellent, and the taste – absolutely fabulous! Even the cost was surprisingly little. It comes as no surprise that Chef Chom's is held in such high esteem.

And to perfect the whole dining experience, as we were sitting eating an ice cream dessert, listening to the Filipino band, we had the pleasure of witnessing the moon rise from the ocean. I'm not sure if that can be arranged every night though!

Chef Chom's has live classical Thai music on Mondays, when it also has special set menus. On Thursdays there's a Thai Buffet, accompanied by traditional Thai dancing, with a full a la carte menu available on other days.

For reservations and further details about  
The Tongsai Bay's other services,  
telephone 0 7742 5015.



# Coming Back For More at Chez Andy



Repeats, repeats, repeats! For a television viewer, there's nothing worse. For the restaurateur however, this is what they strive for. They want their customers to keep coming back – time after time, year after year.

With the average stay on Samui being only 6 days, you'd expect the percentage of repeat customers in a restaurant to be very low. At Chez Andy, the figure is 30%, which is comparable to a well-established city restaurant with a static population. So why do so many people come back here so often? What're the particular attractions of *this* restaurant?

I decided that a visit was in order, so I went along one evening with my wife and 2 small children. Chez Andy is on Chaweng Beach Road, directly opposite Swensen's, the famous ice-cream parlour. And if there is an actual 'centre' of town, then I suppose this is it.

The restaurant comes in two parts. First there's the main building on the road. Downstairs there's a bar area where people can spend time socializing before or after their meal. And upstairs there's an attractive 40-seater restaurant. It's bright, cheerful and clean up here, and is an ideal vantage point to look down on the passing throngs.

But seeing as I was with the family tonight, the garden area around the back seemed more suitable. There's a lot of space out there (enough for 70 seats) and I didn't feel worried that the children would feel too confined. And although it's only 10 metres from the road, it's very quiet, shielded as it is by the main restaurant building.

The kids' eyes lit up when they saw the special Children's Menu: *Halloween Pumpkin Soup* with croutons; *Dinosaur Wienerschnitzel* with French fries; *Al Capone Tomato Spaghetti* with cheese; *Maharaja Chicken* on curry sauce with rice, followed by *Ice Cream & Fruit*. Mine lit up when it was pointed



out that the Children's Menu food is FREE for all kids up to 10 years old! And they can drink as many soft drinks as they want too. Those with sextuplets will be pleased to note there are no limitations on this extraordinary offer!

With the kids sorted out, now it was our turn. But so many choices, and where to start? Thai? Italian? Maybe Swiss, the owner and chef – Andy Muller – is a Swiss national after all. The steaks were tempting, especially so since they come from Australia's famous *Harvey Farm* (complete with import certificate, showing clearance from all those nasty diseases the European market is suffering with). There're even Angus steaks!

**"... it was pointed out that the Children's Menu food is FREE for all kids up to 10 years old!"**

There's also a daily buffet with beef tenderloin, pork steaks, marinated spare ribs, chicken breasts, shish kebabs, sausages, salads, fish, seafood, and a massive spread of vegetables too. My wife chose this, and had no regrets. She particularly enjoyed the spare ribs, but made many return trips to 'try' the rest of the assortment.

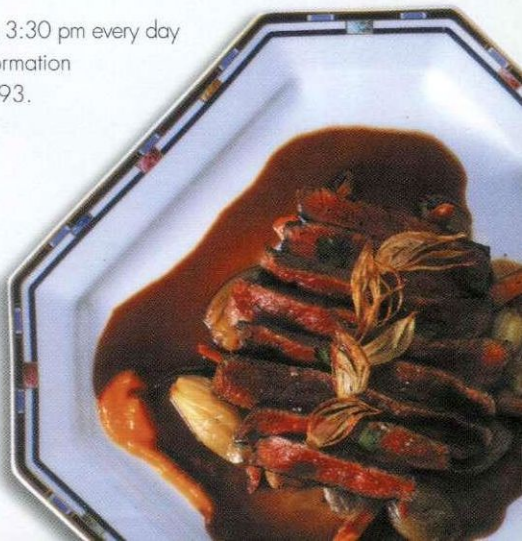
I fancied a fish starter from the a la carte menu, so ordered the *Saumon Fumee* – Norwegian smoked salmon with horseradish sauce, toast and butter. A wise decision. So tender, the salmon just melted in my mouth. Next, a *Boeuf Stroganov* with strips of tenderloin on a tasty paprika cream sauce. My mouth is watering just remembering it!

A delicious *Crepe Suzette* with an orange Cointreau & vanilla sauce seemed like the perfect way to end the meal, and it was!

Those of you who enjoy a good glass of wine with your meal will be interested to learn that Andy makes no profit on his wines. "For me it's important that my diners can drink a quality wine to complement the quality food we serve here," he says. Now that's customer relations!

And it's hardly surprising that with food and service *this* good, that Chez Andy gets so many return customers. In fact, so popular is Chez Andy on Samui, that Andy opened a branch of Chez Andy in Korat in April 2002!

Chez Andy is open from 3:30 pm every day until late. For more information telephone 0 7742 2593.



# Steaks & More at Churrasco Steak House



Ravenous cravings are strange things. Some people would die for a square of their favourite chocolate. Others cannot sleep – knowing that the last slice of Edam cheese is sitting in the fridge, waiting. But perhaps the commonest cry from our carnivorous race is – "I just gotta eat meat!"

And what better place to go than a steakhouse to satisfy that longing. Churrasco is one of Samui's only 'dedicated' steakhouses, so a visit seemed appropriate to see if they were capable of 'delivering the goods'.

Situated on Chaweng Beach Road itself, opposite *Chaweng Regent Beach Resort*, the restaurant is in a prime spot. Easy to find, and an ideal place for people-watching the daily catwalk of passers by. Churrasco is attractively decorated, complete with old cartwheels and buffalo skulls, which gives the restaurant a distinct western flavour. It's open air, but kept cool by many swirling fans. There's seating for 78 and although the tables are close together, it isn't cramped.

And what about the steaks? Well, before anyone starts worrying that they might be eating infected European livestock, let me assure you that all the imported meats for Churrasco come from Australia where they have stringent tests and controls. And not just from any old place 'down under', but from the famous *Harvey Farm* (see the restaurant's import certificate if you'd like to make doubly sure). Anyway, the steaks are mouth-wateringly tender – even, if like me, you like them well done (a sacrilege for true steak connoisseurs!). They are served in sizes varying from 150 to 600 grams, but how anyone could manage anything over 400 is beyond me. Especially since all meals are served with ample portions of vegetables, and so attractively presented too.

But the biggest surprise for me at Churrasco was the enormous choice of other dishes on the menu. This is not only a steakhouse! There's Thai food, pasta, pork, lamb, and even a large salad selection.



The seafood deserves a special mention. *Pan-fried Salmon on Asparagus* served with a béarnaise sauce comes highly recommended, as does the *Grilled Swordfish Slices on a Couched Salad* with balsamic sauce. Both these fish are imported from Tasmania, but are as fresh as the day they were landed.

The rest of the restaurant's seafood is caught locally. An interesting list of starters included my personal favourite – '*Moules Mariniere*', steamed mussels with white wine and herbs – so I had to give it a try. And I was very glad I did. Cooked to perfection, with full marks for the presentation too.

"... the steaks are mouth-wateringly tender  
– even, if like me, you like them well done."

Even the kids have been considered here. There is a special sandwich and snack section – including *The Churrasco Burger*, a cheeseburger with bacon, topped with fried eggs. Should keep the little darlings quiet for a while! And when they've finished that, the desserts will finish them off. All manner of ice cream variations, including the ever-popular *Tiramisu*, and other equally tempting treats are on the menu. Go native by trying the *Samui Kiss* with its 2 scoops of coconut ice cream topped with a shot of coconut rum – you won't regret it!

With wines from France, Italy, Australia and South Africa included in the large drinks list, you can be assured that your favourite tippie will be available to help the meal go down.

The service was polite and friendly, and perhaps the biggest compliment I could give the staff would be to say that I hardly noticed them. They were there when I needed them, and not if I didn't!

And if you think the food here will be expensive – think again. Visiting Australians inform me that the Harvey Farm steaks sold here are *half* the price of those back home! So when you get those meaty cravings now, you'll know where to head for!

Churrasco is open from 3:00 pm with last food orders at 11:00 pm.  
Telephone 0 6274 7662 for further details.



# Another Great Night at Colibri



There are no guarantees in life. So they tell us. *Nothing* is for sure. They'd have us believe. Even the favourite falls sometimes. But do they all? Is it possible that some things can be relied upon – *all* the time?

Colibri has managed to gain a reputation as a restaurant where you can go time after time, week after week, year after year, and be assured of the same high standards every time. That's some reputation! But is it warranted?

Well, it has been around for a long time. Fifteen years in fact, making it the longest established international restaurant on Samui. And in an environment where many come and go over the years, this is no mean feat!

The colourful owner and manager of this tastefully decorated, spacious restaurant is *Detlev*, a Bavarian-raised German, trained in cooking arts and hotel management in Germany and Switzerland. He personally oversees each stage of the operation – from welcoming diners to supervising preparation, and even serving some of the customers himself! And he was there, as usual, to greet my guest and I when we dined at Colibri recently.

The restaurant is at the far end of *Chaweng Boulevard* (a quiet street directly opposite the *Central Samui Beach Resort* on Chaweng Beach Road), and has two parts. A magnificent tropical garden area that can seat 30, and an interior section – that a 5-star resort would be proud of – accommodating up to 36. As it was such a lovely night, we chose to stay outside amongst the lush vegetation, and get down to the serious business we were there for – eating!

There's a board-style menu containing a wide range of international dishes (including some interesting fondues), with the main attraction being Colibri's magnificent barbecue – but more of that later. The wines and drinks list even includes 12 different beers. So, choice is not a problem!

I picked my favourite Colibri starter – *Homemade Tomato Soup*, with garlic bread – to begin the meal, for 2 reasons. Firstly because I love it, and secondly to see if it was as good as it always is. And I wasn't disappointed. Thick and



creamy, topped with croutons – great! My companion also went for a soup, but this time it was *Gazpacho*. And her verdict – perfect!

And next, it was barbecue time. The setup here is absolutely perfect for BBQ lovers, as we are. Just about every meat that you could imagine is on display, ready for cutting. And you get the chance to say exactly what cut you'd like, and how large or small a portion (it's all priced on weight). There's everything from the very best *Australian* and *New Zealand Beef* and *Lamb*, through to local *Pork*, *Chicken* and *Freshly-caught Seafood*. They've even got *Crocodile*, *Kangaroo* and *Ostrich* – should you fancy trying something completely different!

"... and they've even got *Crocodile*, *Kangaroo* and *Ostrich* – should you fancy trying something completely different!"

We happened to be there when they had one of their *Seafood Special Nights*, so I selected an attractive *Tasmanian Salmon*. My friend had already decided to have her first taste of crocodile. You get the choice of barbecuing it yourself at the large BBQ area, or having one of the trained staff prepare it for you. We did it ourselves, and while we were, we got chatting with another couple who were also there cooking their own. It seems to be a good place for meeting people, as the atmosphere is very open and friendly – pretty much like being at a BBQ party at a friend's house!

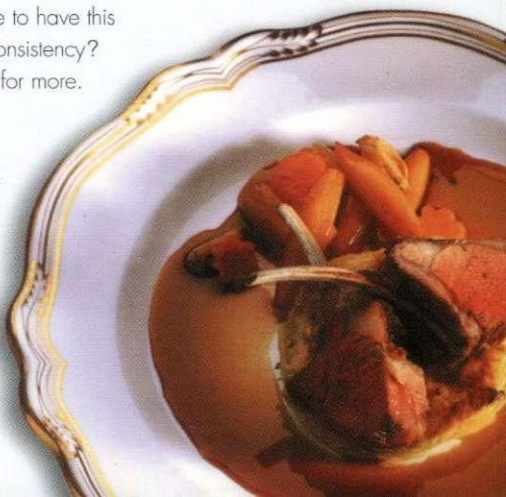
And under the same roof of the cooking area is a large salad bar, from which we helped ourselves and added to our BBQ. The fish was delicious. It's hard to beat a good salmon, especially when it's barbecued. And as for the crocodile, well my companion now has a new favourite meat!

There's no shortage of desserts here either and the *Hot Applestrudel* with *Vanilla Ice-cream* was practically jumping out of the menu at me, so I had to pick it. And was I glad I did! My normal choice – *Peach Melba* – didn't go neglected though. Unfortunately, with its lashing of fresh cream, ice-cream, peaches and strawberries, it was just too much for my partner to finish, so I had to help her. I couldn't let something so tasty go to waste!

And to round off another *Colibri* night, a *Colibri Coffee*. Although with *Kahlua*, *Baileys*, *Rum*, *Amaretto* and *Cao Cao* in it too, a coffee was the last thing it tasted of!

So does *Colibri* deserve to have this wonderful reputation for consistency? Well I keep coming back for more.

For further information  
telephone 0 7723 0810.



# Bon Appétit at Flamingo



The English love their pubs! And Americans adore their burger bars. Germans flock to their beer kellers. But it's the French who have an intimate love affair with their restaurants, and I'm not surprised.

They have a worldwide reputation for loving their food and going to any lengths to make it extra tasty and extra beautiful. And it was with this encouraging thought in mind that I took a friend along to *Corto Maltese* with the enviable task of reviewing their beachside French restaurant – *Flamingo*.

*Corto Maltese* is located at the northern end of Chaweng Beach, just 200 metres beyond *Amari Palm Reef* and *Muang Kulay Pan*. We drove there, but it's only a short walk or taxi ride from the centre of town. At the entrance to *Corto Maltese* is *The Habana Club*, which looked inviting, but we were on our way to eat, and *nothing* would stop us!

We strolled through the resort and within half a minute were at the restaurant. And how lovely it looked, with the floodlit swimming pool one side and the beach on the other. But where to sit? Outside in the spacious, split level garden with its natural rocks and boulders, or in the 34-seater restaurant itself. I particularly liked the décor inside, with its typically Gallic touches, so the decision was made.

It's open-sided, giving a nice through breeze, and with the swirling overhead fans too, the restaurant is pleasantly cool. And for me, it had the ambience of an open-air tropical bistro. So far, so good. 'But what's on the menu?'

Well, the answer to that is – 'Lots!' And it changes on a weekly basis, sometimes sooner. But there's always a choice of pasta, fish, meat, French, Thai and international food. And it's presented in typical bistro-style – chalked on a blackboard! There is even a 3-course lunch/dinner for only 350 Baht (a different one every day). Looking across at the main courses, we realized that it would be wise to order light starters, so we both chose salads. They



were extraordinarily good and surprisingly filling. Needless to say they were served in a style only the French can successfully achieve.

'Have we still got any room for a main course?' Barely! But looking over at the menu, all such thoughts quickly disappear. My friend spots the *Grilled Duck Breast* with a honey and pepper sauce, and immediately makes her decision. And her reaction after eating it – 'Exquisite!'

I saw my favourite – *Grilled Red Snapper* with gratin dauphinois, carrot cake, tomato provencale and beans, topped with a lemon sauce. It was absolutely superb and in order to get through it all, I had to leave almost half of the delicious vegetables on my plate.

"... and for me, it had the ambience of  
an open-air tropical bistro."

But I still ordered a dessert! And what better way of finishing a French meal in a French restaurant, than with a typical French dish – *Creme Brulée*. That's their version of a caramel custard with brown sugar, flambéed at your table. And it was wonderful!

My companion chose the *Copa Cabana* to complete her meal. This is vanilla ice cream with the fruit of the season (which was mango on this occasion), liberally covered with rum and Chantilly. No wonder she was quiet for 10 minutes! Which gave me a chance to seek out the chef – *Benoit Gremaud*.

Having eaten his superb food, I wasn't surprised to discover that he's been satisfying the gastronomic desires of countless diners around the world for many years. I'm just very glad that he's now decided to live on Samui and share his culinary skills with the rest of us!

And before we were leaving, 'Ben' informed us that Flamingo serves afternoon tea every day, with a huge range of fresh cakes and pastries (enough to tempt even the strictest of weight-watchers). And that's the reason why we were back there the next day!

Flamingo is open from 7:00 am for breakfast through until midnight, with last orders at 11:00 pm.

Telephone 0 7723 0041

for more information.



# A Japanese Experience at Hagi



What are you? You're sure to be either one or the other. An adventurous person who has tried Japanese food – and loves it. Or an unfortunate soul who has never tried it. Put off, maybe, by the assumption that *all* Japanese food consists of raw fish – chewy at that!

Well I've got some good news for *both* parties! For the experienced lover of Japanese food – there is a place on Samui that serves the very best of this unique cuisine. And for the wary first timer – all is not as you imagine, as I found out! Read on ...

I'd heard many good things about Hagi Restaurant at *Central Samui Beach Resort*, so decided it was time to try it out for myself. Being one of the poor unfortunates who has never sampled Japanese cuisine, I took along a friend who eats it at every opportunity.

The restaurant itself has to be one of the most attractive I've ever seen. Detached from the main hotel building and set next to a lily-covered fish pond (Japanese Carp of course), it immediately creates an oriental atmosphere. Japanese lanterns lead the way across the water on a wooden path into Hagi. And this is where our first decision has to be made. To eat outside in the balmy tropical air – with the splashing fountains as our background music, or in the stylish air-conditioned restaurant – with its beautiful Japanese fabric paintings, bamboo arrangements and chic décor.

We chose to go inside, but may well have opted to enjoy the warm night had we been here on holiday. On entering, the first thing I notice is the strange table set up. No rows of knives, forks and spoons. No various sized plates spread around. Instead, there are neat, slatted, wooden boards, raised an inch from the table. On these are solitary chopsticks, laid on ceramic holders. Mmmm, exciting!



Next came the menu, but where to start? I needn't have worried about bringing an expert to guide me, the waitress was more than happy, and able, to lead me through it. For me, as a novice, she suggested a set meal. This would give me a broad selection of the different types of dish available. In fact there were 8 dishes: *Chicken Teriyaki* – grilled chicken in teriyaki sauce; *Sashimi* – raw fish; *Nigiri Sushi* – assorted raw fish with rice; *Kanibo Salad & Maki Sushi* – crab stick salad with seaweed & rice rolls; *Beef Teppanyaki* – pan-fried beef and vegetables; *Miso Soup* – soya bean & curd soup; *Oshinko* – Japanese pickles; *Garlic Rice*, and finally – *Green Tea Ice Cream*.

“... set next to a lily-covered fish pond,  
it immediately creates an oriental atmosphere.”

And there was me, thinking that it would all be raw, chewy fish. I was surprised, and delighted that I enjoyed it all so much. And my favourite – the raw fish! Far from being chewy, it was tender, succulent and, above all, very tasty. The executive chef at Central – *Fabian Strutz* – says, “It’s essential the fish served raw for Japanese cuisine is served the same day it was caught. And the fish you’re eating at Hagi this evening was still swimming this morning.”

My dining partner, a sushi fan, went for the *Premium Sushi Plate*. This is a selection of imported and local seafood, served raw, wrapped in and around rice. And as a novel touch, when this plate is ordered, an authentically uniformed master chef arrives at your table and prepares it in front of you. Better than a floorshow!

All the regular drinks are available, but we chose to complement our Japanese dining with a Japanese beer – *Asahi*. This and a powerful *Sake* (a strong Japanese wine, served warm) completed the meal in style.

And I’m happy to say that Japanese cuisine has *another* convert! How about you?

Hagi is open from  
6 – 11:00 pm every day.  
Telephone 0 7723 0500  
for more information.



# A Tropical Night Jungle<sup>at</sup> Park Restaurant



No, it's not a safari park. There are no lions or tigers wandering around in the undergrowth here! And although this is a family-orientated place, it isn't an adventure park either. What Jungle Park Resort is, is one of the most attractive small hotel/resorts on Samui.

Lush tropical gardens, cascading waterfalls, trickling streams, scenic views, and lots and lots of space. All the ingredients, in fact, for an exotic holiday in the Far East. But I wasn't here to stay in the superb accommodation. No, I'm here to sample the gastronomic side of their service. I've come to visit Jungle Park Restaurant.

It's always exciting and welcome news hearing that there's a new eating establishment on Samui serving gourmet food. Especially when it's outside of Chaweng! Jungle Park Resort is just off the ring-road, 1 1/2 kilometres before Lamai on the way from Chaweng. It's well sign-posted and easy to find.

My wife and I arrived about 6:30 pm. It was still light enough to appreciate our beautiful surroundings as we strolled down from the car park, through the reception area, on past the floodlit swimming pool and then finding a seat at the rustic beach bar. And this was when I knew for sure that we were going to really enjoy ourselves.

A smiling barman was immediately there with the full and exciting drinks menu. Feeling so tropical, and being in such an exotic mood, we ordered cocktails: *Indiana Jones* – an alcohol-packed special for my wife, and *Sawadee* – a non-alcoholic one for the driver. Now we were ready to eat!

The restaurant is spread along a raised, sandy terrace. Swimming pool one side, palm-fringed beach the other. Cooling breezes, discreet lighting, well-set tables, jazzy music in the background, and again – immediate, friendly service. This time it was a uniformed waitress, who presented us with a large, colourful menu and a comprehensive wine list (French, Italian, Thai – it's all there).



Each course is split into 4 sub-sections: Thai, French, Italian, International and vegetarian. There's also snack food, hamburgers and the like, should you fancy something simple. They're looking after everyone here!

Both my wife and I love French food, and there are so few places on Samui where you can get the best, so we chose French dishes for our starters. I ordered the *Mixed Seafood Pie* in a white wine sauce, and my health-conscious wife chose the *Soil Salad* – strips of bacon, croutons, poached egg, and black olives on a mesclun of green salad.

“... feeling so tropical, and being in such an exotic mood,  
we ordered cocktails.”

And no sooner had we finished our drinks that the food arrived. The presentation made it look too good to eat. But we were so hungry, we spoiled the artwork. And were we glad we did! Excellent taste and so much of it. Hope the main course is as good.

Having loved the French starter so much, I decided to stay with that cuisine for the main course and ordered the *Tournedos with Bordeaux wine sauce* – a grilled fillet of beef marinated with shallots, potatoes and Bordeaux wine sauce. Only a Frenchman, in his own language, could describe how delicious these dishes were – and to do them justice. I'll simply say that you won't easily find better; they were extraordinarily good!

My wife was equally impressed with the *Mixed Grill Seafood* – a wide selection of grilled barracuda, red snapper, king prawns and scallops.

And now, my favourite course – dessert. Surely it couldn't match the taste and quality of the earlier courses? I picked the *Apple-pie Miss Tatin Style*, while my wife ordered the *Bounty* – fresh coconut pie with a hot chocolate sauce. And this was the moment I shamed myself. The gourmet became the gourmand. My apple pie was so incredibly delicious that I ordered a second one – and couldn't finish it!

So, is the 'new kid on the culinary block' up to the high standards set by our other recommended restaurants? The answer has got to be a resounding – 'Yes!' – Jungle Park Restaurant can walk proudly amongst them – with its head held high. Especially so since they also host a great 'Full-moon Party' with Caribbean, Brazilian, and Latin music every month!

For reservations and further information,  
telephone 0 7741 8034.

(Un message pour les visiteurs  
Français: Ici, vous trouverez  
une cuisine gastronomique  
Thai, adaptée à votre  
fin palais...)



# Discover the Magic at La Brasserie



Sometimes it's the location. Other times it's the décor. With some, it's the ambience. Even the service. Most often it's the food. These are the reasons most people go to a particular restaurant. But when all of these attractions can be found in one place, then it becomes a *special* restaurant. One worthy of recommendation.

So does La Brasserie at *Chaweng Beachcomber Hotel* fall into this elite category? Local residents assured me that indeed it does, but why should I take their word for it, when I could go there and sample it for myself? If it's as good as they tell me, then it won't be any hardship!

Finding La Brasserie was easy. It's in the middle of Chaweng's long sandy beach. And the location here would be hard to beat. Coconut palm trees swaying in the cooling breeze with the Gulf of Siam lapping gently just 5 metres away.

But where to sit? Shall it be on the beach itself, at one of the tables set up there? Or in the 40-seater restaurant building, with all its finery? No, tonight I'm with a companion, and she prefers to dine on the spacious terrace, so that's where we'll be! It's comfortable out here, with ample room for 50 diners. And a beautiful, leafy tree creates a natural ceiling above, reflecting the lamplight back down upon us.

The menu gives many choices, but I'm told that if there's something we particularly fancy, that isn't on it, they'll make it especially for us. Now that's something you don't hear in many restaurants!

But there are lots we see that we would like to try, so we set about ordering a starter. Being a seafood-lover, I go for the *Crispy Soft-shell Whole Crab* on a green mango salad with a wasabi dressing. My partner immediately spots the *Chilled Gazpacho Soup*, and has no hesitation in making a quick decision.



Both dishes swiftly arrive and how attractive they look too! They taste as delicious as they appear, and start our mouths watering for the main course. •

We ate Thai food yesterday, and Italian food the evening before that, so we order two of the other international dishes on offer: *Braised Lamb* with asparagus, potato gnocci, crispy carrot ribbons, and a red wine glaze; and the *Roast Duck Leg* on young cabbage, fried polenta cake with a tamarind-honey sauce. (We are also tempted by the *Zucchini Fritters Stack* with basil, mozzarella cheese, tomato sauce and pesto, but that will have to wait for another day!) And these dishes don't come any better! Again the presentation is superb, matched only by the taste. I've got to find out who the chef is here!

"... with the Gulf of Siam lapping gently just 5 metres away."

Something cool and light seems appealing for dessert so we order the *Coconut Pannacotta* with a tropical Thai fruit salad. And what a salad! It's a mixture of local fruit, steeped in syrup, flavoured with ginger and chilli. All these different tastes, combined with the coconut, instantly make it my favourite dessert.

And just as we sit back and relax, enjoying an excellent cappuccino, the very man we want to meet appears. It's the executive chef – *Steven Van Duyn*. He's been at La Brasserie since November 2000, and what a treasure they have in him! Steve's from New Zealand, where he's had extensive cooking experience for many years, working in several award winning restaurants – and I'm not surprised at that! His philosophy is: 'Keep it simple, and give importance to the marriage of different flavours on a plate.' Sounds good to me. And he further enlightens us that there's a lot more to La Brasserie than just the 'à la carte' menu. On various evenings they have special theme nights too!

So does La Brasserie deserve to be recommended as one of Samui's special restaurants? Well, with the great location, perfect ambience and the superb food, I think there can be little doubt!

The restaurant's open every day from 10:30 am till 11:00 pm.

For details of the theme nights and further information,

telephone 0 7742 2041-43.



# In the Heart of Things at La Taverna



Isn't it great to be quiet sometimes? And isn't it nice to be away from everything, on occasion too? But don't you find that there are times when you just want to be in the middle of the action? Seeing life going on around you at a hectic pace – but being relaxed yourself. You do? Well, so do I. But where to go?

There's no trouble in finding places like this on Samui. Chaweng, in particular, is full of them. But when you try to find a *restaurant* like this that serves excellent food, and is a quality establishment in its own right, then it starts to become a difficult task. And if you're looking for a place that specializes in a particular cuisine, like Italian, then it's like finding a needle in a haystack.

This is where personal recommendations are invaluable! Many friends, acquaintances and Italian food lovers, who like to be in the heart of things, told me to try La Taverna. And who was I to argue, especially when it meant trying out another top restaurant?

Just one lane away from *Soi Green Mango*, next door to *Black Jack Bar* and across the road from many beer bars, La Taverna is indeed in the middle of the nightlife scene. It's open from midday till midnight and it's open-air, but kept cool by the many ceiling fans swirling overhead. My girlfriend and I are greeted by one of the smart waitresses and led immediately to an available table.

Apparently, all the major sporting events are screened at the restaurant, but there are plenty of tables away from the TVs, if you're not a sports enthusiast yourself. We settle ourselves into our seats, and seconds later we're presented with the menu.

And what a varied and tempting one it is, with a great selection of Italian wines too. I'm drawn to the *Antipasti di Mare* – with its mayonnaise and crab; tomato, oregano and garlic on mussels; squid stuffed with minced beef, cappas and olive; plus mixed seafood. It reads like a main course, but I'm



sure the portion will be 'starter' size, leaving me enough room for a good pizza. Fortunately/unfortunately I'm wrong – in a big way! The dish is enormous and I think it'll take me a week to finish. The only thing that helps me to get through it is the wonderful taste. I can't leave any of it.

Meanwhile, my girlfriend has ordered the *Tagliatelle Alla Polpa di Granchio* with crabmeat and whipped cream. This is a large portion too. She manages to clean her plate and happily announces: 'That was brilliant!'

"... my girlfriend is a pasta lover, especially when it's homemade – as everything is at La Taverna."

I've already ordered my *Calzone Pizza* – filled with tomato, mozzarella, ham, mushrooms, salami, and cottage cheese, and am regretting my extravagance. Until I see it, that is! There's no way that I'll manage all of it, but I'll give it a try. It smells heavenly – but tastes even better! My girlfriend is a pasta lover, especially when it's homemade – as everything is at La Taverna. She chooses the *Neapolitan Lasagna*, and I can see her mouth watering as it comes to the table absolutely filled to bursting with salami, ham, whipping cream, and bolognaise.

And the only reason I order a dessert at all is so that I can write about it – believe me! With so many tempting homemade specials to choose from, it's decision time. Shall it be the *Tiramisu*, or maybe the *Profiteroles*? But then again, how about the *Chocolate Mousse*? After much drooling, I eventually opt for the *Profiteroles*. And yes, I can highly recommend it, as I can with this restaurant.

It's so rewarding when you do eventually find that needle in a haystack!

For reservations and further information,  
telephone 0 7741 3006.



# Fine Dining at Laguna Terrace



Fantastic! Wonderful! Great food! Terrific value for money! These are a few of the comments made about this restaurant. But are they warranted? Is *Laguna Terrace* really *that* good?

Well, '*the proof of the pudding is in the eating*', they say. So I visited there one night, with a friend, to do just that!

The restaurant is in *Blue Lagoon*, one of Chaweng's top resort hotels. And being on Chaweng Beach Road, slightly north of the new *Time Square*, next to *Amari Palm Reef*, it's easy to find and within a short walking distance of the central area of town.

The resort is very attractive, with its ornate Thai-style roofs dominating the entrance façade. And especially so at dusk, when floodlit alongside the swaying palms. After a short stroll through the picturesque hotel gardens, and past the freeform swimming pool, we arrived beachside at the restaurant.

Laguna Terrace is in two parts. There's the 70-seat, open-air interior with its views across to the swimming pool on one side and the sea on the other. Then there's the 60-seat outside terrace, on the upper reaches of the beach itself. Any closer to the water and you'd be watching out for every wave!

And this is where the only problem of the evening arose – what to choose for dinner! There's Thai food, seafood, and international cuisine on the always-available a la carte menu. But then there are so many special promotions too.

On Mondays there's a set Thai menu – for introducing newcomers to the national cuisine (with traditional Thai dancing from 8-10:00 pm). And it's *World Buffet* night on Wednesdays, when you can mix and match your meal from different parts of the globe. There's a *Spanish Tapas*, *Arab Mezze* and *Italian Anti-pasta* appetisers section, a steak BBQ area, plus an Asian Corner with everything from Chinese roast duck through to Thai specials such as '*Tom Yam Gung*'. And there's a special desserts selection too.

• Laguna Terrace hosts an *Asian Night-market* every Saturday with a wide selection of dishes from *Thailand*, *China*, *Vietnam*, *Indonesia* and *Malaysia*,



giving you a chance of sampling even more exotic dishes. There's live entertainment too, as there is five nights out of seven at the restaurant.

Where was I? Ah, yes, the food! We were there on a Thursday, and the Thai Buffet looked absolutely delicious. But we'd eaten the local cuisine at lunchtime, so we both opted for international a la carte.

And everything seemed so tempting. But we *had* to make a choice. I picked the *Toscana Rice-paper Roll* filled with smoked ham, mozzarella cheese, tomato & basil, served with a balsamico chili sauce to begin our evening's culinary journey, while my companion ordered the *Seafood Salad* – a wide variety of seafood, fresh from the *Gulf of Thailand*, marinated with coconut and lime. The speedy waiter was back at the table in no time with our dishes. They looked so good that we took a couple of moments appreciating the presentation before giving in to our appetites. And were they as tasty as they appeared? In a word – yes!

“... and if you were any closer to the water, you'd be watching out for every wave!”

If the starters were impressive, then the main courses were a knockout. My friend had *Grilled Chicken-breast* gratinated with feta cheese, served on onion potatoes with an olive-lemon sauce, while I had *Fillet of Salmon* in a cashew nut crust, with Thai broccoli, steamed rice and honey-soya sauce. The fish just melted in my mouth as the flavour of the sauce had my taste buds praising the chef!

And his name is Gerry (pronounced Gairy) Prinz. He's Austrian and has recently arrived in Samui after working in *Hong Kong, Singapore, the Middle East, California, New Zealand* and many more places around the globe. He has obviously picked up invaluable skills along the way, as his food is truly sensational! Using Thai ingredients, Viennese style and worldwide knowledge, he creates mouthwatering dishes, time after time. And he's a nice chap too!

As a final test of Gerry's skills, we ordered our desserts. For me, *Warm Chocolate Cake* with marinated cherries and vanilla ice-cream, and for my companion, *Black Rice Pudding* on a tropical fruit sauce. The pudding was eaten – now we had the proof. And the conclusion? The man's a genius!

So, were the superlatives used by previous diners justified? Is Laguna Terrace as good as I'd been led to expect. In truth, the answer has got to be 'No - it's even better!'

For reservations, details of their theme nights and further information, telephone 0 7742 2037-40.



# A Romantic Night Out at the Meranté Restaurant



*Romance.* Strange thing isn't it? But isn't it wonderful! And when you're on holiday, away from the pressures of everyday life, it's a lot easier to feel romantic too.

Moonlit strolls, hand in hand, along the beach. Morning swims over the coral reef. And, that most important thing of all, a candlelit dinner at a romantic restaurant.

But which restaurant? Candles are cheap, most restaurants have them. And anyone can put on a *Whitney Houston* tape. But where can you go where everything just oozes romance?

There aren't many places, but one that's always recommended by residents and locals alike is the *Meranté Restaurant* at Amari Palm Reef Resort. So what better place for celebrating my wedding anniversary, and reviewing a restaurant at the same time.

Amari Palm Reef is in the northern end of Chaweng, just a 10 minute walk or 1 minute taxi ride from *Starbucks Coffee* in the centre of the nightlife area, so getting there is no problem. The entrance to the resort is beautiful with its traditional Thai-style architecture, but especially so at sunset. The floodlights shine up to the ornate roofs and onto the swaying palm trees, with the orange and red sky acting as a colourful backdrop.

We went through into the tropical garden and saw Meranté on our left. It too is a Thai-style building, which adds a touch of romance in itself. On the ground floor there's a bar, with the restaurant up a short flight of steps above. There are two distinct parts to Meranté: a 26-seat lower terrace, and a 48-seat, interior area up another small staircase.

• And as we went up the steps we could see the chairs and tables with their umbrellas on the lower terrace, loved it, and went no further. The terrace



overlooks the floodlit swimming pool and on to the shimmering Gulf of Siam beyond.

With the palm trees silhouetted against a blaze of oranges and reds; romantic live music drifting down from above; aromatic flowers decorating the table; candles flickering in their lanterns; an exotic cocktail in my hand, and the woman I love in front of me, what more could I possibly ask for? In a word – food!

And there is no shortage of that here either. The menu goes on and on. There's Thai, fresh seafood, Italian, plus an extensive international selection too. And as if that isn't enough already, every day there's a special promotion. Today's was lobster, but we'd already made our choices.

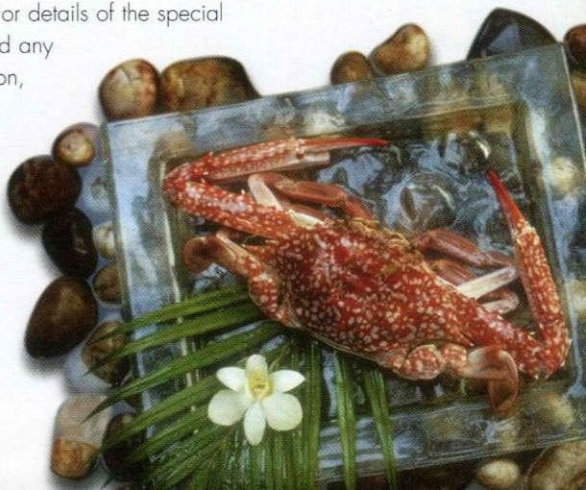
“... it's a Thai-style building,  
which adds a touch of romance in itself.”

My wife ordered a Thai starter – *Gai Hor Bai Toey* – grilled chicken wrapped in pandanus leaves, and I went for the *Smoked Tasmanian Salmon* on toasted wholegrain bread. Neither of us are wine lovers, but on special occasions we have a tipple. And although the Meranté Restaurant has a good selection, we opted for the house white, which was great.

In no time at all the dishes arrived, and how splendid they looked too. And the taste – superb! My wife is a seafood lover, but also loves her native Thai cuisine, so picked the *Pla Tord Sam Ros* – deep-fried fish fillets with a sweet and sour chili sauce, as her main course. I was also in the seafood mood, so ordered the *Broiled Fillet of Sea Bass* with herb butter. Both were as delicious as the starters.

And just as we were served, three Filipino singers, who we'd heard from above, came to our table. They're a father/son/daughter trio called *Strings and Harmony*. Extremely professional and a joy to listen to. They were circling the restaurant serenading each and every diner. And, believe me, it doesn't get much more romantic than this. If we hadn't have been celebrating our wedding anniversary, I think I would have proposed!

The Meranté Restaurant is open every day from 7:00 am till 11:00 pm. For details of the special theme nights and any further information, telephone 0 7742 2015.



# Spoilt for Choice at Noori India



In this world – there's a reason for everything. You go on holiday – because you work hard all year. You come to *Samui* – because it's a tropical paradise. And you love eating *Thai* food – because it's so delicious. But you like a change too – because you don't want the same cuisine every day.

*Indian* is a great alternative. It's still *Asian* – you are in Asia after all. It's still spicy – giving it that distinctly *Oriental* flavour. And it's still absolutely delicious – if you go to the right restaurant!

But there are surprisingly few Indian restaurants on *Samui*. And there are even fewer that provide the things that we in the *West* have come to expect of a quality Indian restaurant. We're used to having three things. Firstly, and most importantly, excellent food – with a good selection. Secondly, we expect attentive and efficient service. And thirdly, the surroundings and atmosphere must be pleasant and relaxing – a place where we'd be happy to be on a great night out. Not just going there to fill ourselves up!

Although it's only been open since December 2001, *Noori India* has already established itself as just such a restaurant. And for some very good reasons. Let's take a look at the food first.

The menu is dazzling. It's got all the favourites, plus a whole lot more. If you like *Vegetable Samosas* at your local Indian take-away, you'll love these! The *Chicken Tikka Masala* – boneless chicken marinated in Indian spices and then roasted in the Tandoor oven is also first-class. And the *Shami Kebab* – deep-fried mashed lamb mixed with egg and Indian spices will surely get your mouth watering. And these are just a few of the appetizers!

As an indication of just how extensive the menu is, there are 20 different breads alone! And vegetarians will be pleased to note that there are 22 dishes just for you, including a magnificent *Dal Makhani* – black lentils boiled and garnished with Indian spices then topped with cream. An exciting



alternative from having to eat yet *another* salad!

Another dish worthy of special mention is the *Chicken Madras* – succulent pieces of chicken cooked with tomatoes, capsicum and other Indian spices. It really is marvellous. And then there's their delicious *Lamb Rogan Josh* – fresh lamb cooked in egg with mustard seeds. You'd have to go a long way to find a better one!

Most of the desserts are authentic Indian dishes such as: *Rasgulla* – cottage cheese balls, boiled in rich syrup and then served cold, and *Gulab Jamun* – milk-cream fried balls dipped in syrup. But they do serve ice-cream desserts too for traditionalists who prefer ending their meal with that perennial western favourite!

*"... and if you like Vegetable Samosas at your local Indian take-away back home, you'll love these!"*

So how is it that the food's so much better here than at rival Indian restaurants? Well, that could have something to do with the chef – 'Ramshroop' – or as he's more affectionately known – 'Cha-cha' (uncle). He's been working in Indian restaurants for the past 44 years, and what he doesn't know about this particular cuisine isn't worth knowing! Mention a dish that isn't on the menu (which is practically impossible!), and he'll disappear back into the kitchen and prepare it for you. Cooking Indian cuisine is Cha-cha's life's work. He takes great pride in what he does – with every justification!

And Cha-cha isn't the only member of staff who makes Noori India a special restaurant. The friendly serving-staff couldn't be more helpful either, and are always there to take your next order. Which is exactly what you want when you're hungry for more!

So that just leaves the restaurant itself. You'll be pleased to learn that although it's very easy to get to (it's 10 metres along a quiet street just 50 metres North of the famous 'Poppies Resort and Restaurant' on Chaweng Beach Road in South Chaweng, and well sign-posted), it's away from the dusty, noisy road itself. Noori India has seating for 36 and you can choose between outside, terrace or interior tables. The restaurant is smart with an orange and green colour scheme that makes a pleasant backdrop for an evening's culinary pleasure.

And as we were saying earlier – 'there's a reason for everything in this world'. But there are *many* reasons for eating at Noori India!

The restaurant is open from 11:00 am – 11:30 pm. For further information, reservations, and take-away orders (free delivery in Chaweng area), telephone 0 7741 3600.



# Discover the Treasure at Oriental Gallery



After getting that all-important tan, what's next on the holiday agenda? "Shopping for treasure and dining for pleasure", is the usual response. It's seldom you can do that in the same place. But wouldn't it be great if you could? Well you can!

Oriental Gallery first made its name on Samui 11 years ago when it opened as a showroom for interesting pieces of Asian art, antiques and furniture. Two years later an adjacent restaurant by the same name was launched. And what better way to furnish it, than with beautiful artifacts from the Gallery!

It's locally acknowledged as one of the most stylish restaurants on the island, so I decided to check whether the food there matched the décor. It's all very well sitting at antique tables amidst ancient statues, looking up at lovely chandeliers, but can it produce the goods in the food department too?

Finding the Oriental Gallery was no problem. It's prominently positioned on the *Chaweng Beach Road*, 400 metres north of *Central Samui Beach Resort*. And what an impressive building it is too. The restaurant and air-conditioned gallery are on the ground floor, with their sister restaurant *Upstairs* – upstairs!

Oriental Gallery restaurant has a beautiful interior, but as it was a clear, warm, starlit evening my companion and I chose the garden area outside. Placed behind the attractive front wall, it has a private courtyard atmosphere. Abundant tropical plants, tiled flooring, terra cotta wall décor, intimate booth seating and Latin jazz music further established this relaxed and refined scenario.

When the menu arrived, the first shock I had were the prices. In this sort of establishment I was expecting to be paying top dollar. How wrong could I be! And the second shock – the variety of dishes. Here I found Thai dishes that most restaurants seldom offer. Mmmm ... I wonder if they'll be 'up to the mark'?

The various 'Set Menus for 2' were very tempting, and we almost went for



the first one. At 350 Baht per person you get: *Favourite Siamese Classics* – miang cone, spring rolls, fish cakes & prawn crackers; *Tom Yam Gung* – hot & sour soup with prawns; *Gaeng Kiaw Waan Gai* – green chicken curry; *Pakana Pad Neua* – beef with Thai broccoli in oyster sauce; *Pak Bung Fai Daeng* – Thai spinach stir-fried with soya beans; steamed rice, and the *Thai Dessert of the Day* to finish off. Phew!

We weren't sure if we could manage all that so we opted instead for the *Three Dip Special* – homemade guacamole, salsa and tzaziki dips with homemade bread, and the *Bags of Gold* – homemade deepfried wontons with minced shrimp and pork, served with a sweet plum sauce. And they were simply delicious!

“... and Latin jazz music further established this relaxed and refined scenario.”

All the main courses are Asian, with special sections devoted to vegetarians and seafood lovers respectively. And should your partner fancy something more Western while you immerse yourself in Oriental cuisine – no problem! A part of the menu is shared with the international restaurant – *Upstairs*.

The *Thai Roast Beef* – marinated braised beef served on a bed of cucumber, comes personally recommended by proprietor *Michel*, so we ordered that alongside a *Pia Thod Krathian Prikthai* – a whole red snapper, deep fried with garlic and pepper. And I can happily say that both were mouth-wateringly tasty!

The aptly named *Death by Delight* – a lethal combination of dark and white chocolate mousse, rounded off a superb meal, but it was only greed that made us order it – not hunger!

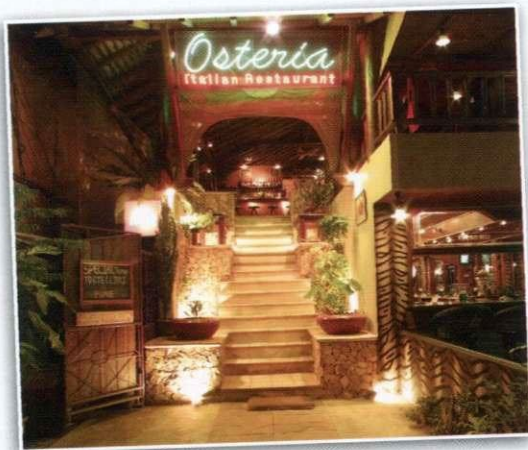
So does the food do justice to the surroundings? I'll answer by saying that you'll find treasure here on the plates – as well as all around you!

Oriental Gallery restaurant is open from midday (when it serves delicious 3-course set lunches for just 175 Baht), and although you probably won't need a reservation for dinner (it comfortably seats 60), it's advisable to book if you'd like to secure a special table.

Telephone 0 7742 2200  
for further information  
and reservations.



# Fine Dining - Italian-style at Osteria



Making grand entrances and exciting exits. Film stars do it all the time. But how often do restaurants make them? Well, if there's a grander entrance to a restaurant on Samui, I've yet to see it. In fact, it would be worth visiting *Osteria* just to look this feature alone. But there's more to *this* Italian restaurant than just its beautiful approach...a lot more!

For one thing, the food is superb. But more of that later. Let's get back to the entrance and the décor for a moment. The light-grey, stone staircase leading up to this first floor restaurant with its ornate, lily-covered water pots and tropical plants is particularly inviting. And it doesn't stop there. Teak pillars, crisp linen-covered tables, the subtle use of lighting, and abundant displays of 'Bird of Paradise' plants, all play their own part in creating a stylish backdrop for an evening's fine dining.

Being up above the Chaweng's distinctive, new fun pub/cocktail bar 'Pickles', opposite *Central Samui Beach Resort*, means it's impossible to miss. And enjoying this elevated position also makes it a great place for looking down at the activity on the *Chaweng Beach Road* below, of which there's lots!

There's seating for 64 up here, with plenty of room between the tables. So you'd find it difficult to eavesdrop, especially over the softly-playing Latin music in the background. And it's completely open-sided, allowing the cool breezes to blow through helping the swirling overhead fans.

The service is swift, friendly, and most importantly – reliable. Most of the staff have been at *Osteria* for many years, and this experience shows. Immediately after being seated at your table, you're presented with the drinks list and attractive wooden menu. And quite a menu it is too!

• Every imaginable Italian dish is on it, with everything from tantalizing anti-pastas through to pizzas and pastas themselves, and finally some special Italian desserts.



Especially recommended anti-pasta dishes include the *Vitello Tonnato* – delicious beef slices with a tuna paste, and the *Zuppa di Cozze alla Livornese* – succulent mussels in a tasty tomato soup *Livornese*-style.

And, without doubt, the incredible *Gnocci al Gorgonzola* – homemade pasta balls in a blue cheese sauce – is definitely worth trying. It melts in the mouth, quite literally, without all the chewing that often accompanies gnocci, and it's sensational.

For spaghetti enthusiasts, the *Spaghetti di Mare al Cartoccio* baked in a banana leaf and coated in a wonderful seafood sauce is an excellent choice.

“... and the incredible *Gnocci al Gorgonzola* – homemade pasta balls in a blue cheese sauce – is definitely worth trying.”

And if you are a *real* seafood fan, the *Grigliata Mista di Pesce* – mixed barbecued seafood *Italian*-style – is sure to fulfil your gastronomic desires. The *Trancio di Tonno al Guazzetto* – tuna steak with a typically Italian fresh tomato and lemon sauce – is also worth mentioning for its authentic flavours.

The Pizzas at Osteria are also homemade, and the famous *Quattro Stagioni*, that's 4 pizzas in one – ham, seafood, mushroom and basil-leaf – is particularly recommended if there's more than one of you opting for this dish. And finally, dessert.

Osteria call it *Mousse al Cioccolato*. The English would call it *Chocolate Mousse*. But I'd call it one of the best desserts you can find on Samui. Try it and judge for yourself. The *Tiramisu* also comes highly recommended and is, perhaps, the perfect way of rounding off a traditional Italian meal.

Complementing the extensive menu is a wide range of excellent wines from Chile, Australia, and, of course, Italy. And the good news is that they are priced at fractionally more than cost, enabling you to enjoy the dining experience fully, without paying outrageous bills!

So, I've spoken about the grand entrance, but what about the exciting exit? Well that's easy, all diners at Osteria are invited for a free drink at 'Pickles' on the ground-floor when they leave. And with the walls in this lively new venue painted like tiger-skin (it's zebra-skin in the bathroom), a DJ who actually *talks* to you as well as playing music you can actually *listen* to, and a bar that doesn't shut till 2:00 am, it doesn't get much more exciting on Samui!

Osteria is open from 6 – 11:00 pm. For reservations and further information, telephone 0 7742 2079.



# Turning Dreams into Memories at Panviman



What did you expect? You've read the brochures. You've chatted with friends. And you've probably already conjured up an image of you and your partner in a Samui restaurant after a hard day's sunbathing.

The sound of the surf, lapping the nearby shore. Palms swaying gently in the breeze. Comfortable seating in spacious surrounds. Friendly staff in close attendance. With a menu offering a wide variety of local and international dishes.

Well, there are several restaurants on the island where you can turn that dream into reality. But if you want superb food too, accompanied by excellent wine, it's not so easy!

Chaweng's renowned *Panviman Restaurant* claims to provide all of the above – and more! Mmm...proud words, but are they justified? There was only one way for me to find out...

There are two ways to reach the centrally-located Panviman. You can get there via *Chaweng Beach Road* by going down the lane almost opposite (and slightly south of) *Sawang Optical*, and then following the signs for *Anchor House Bungalows* and Panviman. Or you can take the scenic route and go along the beach. It's a couple of hundred metres north of *Chaweng Buri Resort*, a hundred metres south of *Chaweng Gardens*. And the landmark to look out for on the beach is the mini *Arc de Triumph* that acts as the entrance to Panviman.

And no sooner had my friend and I entered the archway, than we were greeted and seated by a charming waitress. There's seating for 50 here, all within sight of the sea, but we were lucky enough to have a beachside table (do reserve your table if you'd like to make sure of one beachside yourself). The exterior walls and the floor tiling are all terra-cotta, producing a wonderfully warm tropical atmosphere. And along with the soft lighting emitting from attractive lanterns, plus the omnipresent palm trees shimmering in the moonlight, the mental image was fast becoming a reality.



They were right about the menu too – it's huge! Whole sections for salads, pork, steaks, pasta, fish, fondues and even special set-meals. And that's just the international fare! It's all prepared by *Stefan Sauser*, a master Swiss chef, formally at the world-famous *Grand Palace Hotel Gstaad*, so it should be pretty special. There's an interesting selection of Thai cuisine too. Prepared by *Khun Hugo*, a highly professional Thai chef who's also had many years experience in kitchens around the world.

And it's worth noting at this point that Panviman really does have an excellent wine list. *French, German, Swiss, Italian, Californian, Australian, Chilean* and *South African* wines are all here, and although the bottles aren't cheap, they're priced at little more than cost.

“... and it's worth noting at this point that Panviman really does have an excellent wine list!”

It's times like this that I'm spoilt for choice. I'd really like to choose several of the dishes, but have to select just the one. But first the starters. And for me the *Light Tomato Vegetable Mousse with fresh asparagus*, while my companion ordered *Mussels on a Creamy White Wine Sauce*.

Both dishes arrived swiftly, and disappeared even faster! Truly delectable. And now the hardest choice of the night. Whether to go for the *Delice Rouge* – a combination of sautéed filet of white snapper & king prawns on *Sauce Rouge* with salted boiled potatoes and vegetable rice, or *Sausi's Aussi Steak* – 200 grams of best Australian beef on a red wine butter sauce served with French fries and assorted vegetables. I eventually decided on the steak while my friend went for a Thai dish – *Koko Prawn* – sautéed king prawns in crumbed-coconut on a light curry sauce with steamed vegetables and rice.

Excellent! Both chefs proved that their reputations are, indeed, justified. But although I wasn't left in any doubt, I wanted one last piece of proof – the dessert! *Crepe Suzette* it was, and it was served in an orange juice and *Grand Marnier* sauce with fresh mangoes, apples, water-melon, grapes and strawberries.

I don't know whether your eyes have ever shut involuntarily when you've eaten something amazingly tasty, but mine did then. Simply unbelievable!

At Panviman, the dreams of a Samui night are brought into reality, ready for you to take home as happy memories.

The restaurant is open from  
12:00 am till late  
(the kitchen  
shuts at 11:00 pm).  
For reservations and  
further information,  
telephone  
0 7741 3041.



# Value for Money at Pisces '99



'Does expensive necessarily mean very good?' So many times we see designer-labelled items that are really very, well, 'ordinary'. And they cost the proverbial fortune. The reverse question can also be asked. 'If it's cheap, does that mean that it's *under-par*?'

Some people are put-off buying something that seems suspiciously inexpensive – 'What's the catch?' – they ask. And that goes for food too. How many times have you dined at an up-market, expensive restaurant and ended up eating a mediocre meal? But isn't it so nice when you stumble across a place where the food is excellent, and the bill doesn't seem quite enough? Not that you want to complain or anything.

*Pisces '99* opened in, yes, you guessed it, 1999. And being immediately opposite, Chaweng's premier hotel – *Central Samui Beach Resort* – means it's easy to find. But before you make the final plunge and enter, why not try one of the sample tasters that the charming, uniformed staff offer to passersby. It will only confirm that you've made the right decision!

Crossing a little wooden bridge over a fishpond takes you away from the hustle-bustle of *Chaweng Beach Road*, and into the secluded garden area of *Pisces '99*. There's room for 120 here, so it's a relatively large place, but certainly doesn't feel crowded. Coloured floodlights illuminate the palm-trees, while lanterns and a replica gas street-lamp throw light upon the rest of the garden. There's a romantic oil-lamp on each table too, setting the scene for what's to come.

And firstly, it's a menu. Presented with pride by a smiling waitress. In it, is something for everyone. Pages and pages are devoted to each section: Thai, International, Seafood, Steaks and Pasta. And whether you're here for just a glass of beer, or a complete banquet, the salad bar is complimentary. Help yourself! What was I saying about reasonable prices?



If you're going for Thai cuisine, do try the *Pisces Hors d' Oeuvre* to get you started. In it you'll find a delicious selection of spring rolls, chicken satays, shrimp cakes and crab meatballs. A great introduction to the Thai food on offer here. And there's both Thai and International seafood available too. The Thai – *Pla Nung Manao* – steamed white snapper with vegetables in a refreshing lemon sauce, is very recommendable, as are the International dishes – *Barracuda in Lemon Butter* – sautéed fillet of barracuda with capers, served with boiled potatoes, and the – *Lobster Thermidor* – baked lobster with Thermidor sauce served with mixed vegetables.

“... and as if excellent food and great service weren't enough already, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays there's Thai dancing too!”

And it's worth noting at this point that all the beef and lamb dishes contain only the very best imported meats from *Australia* and *New Zealand*. So you can be sure that not only do they taste excellent, but that the produce has passed stringent health controls too.

Pasta lovers won't be disappointed either! The *Lasagna al Forno* – baked layer pasta with a tomato & meat sauce topped with cheese is sure of satisfying even the most particular of gourmet Italians!

As an addition to the daily dessert menu there's also a *Special Dessert Promotion*. It changes on a monthly basis and features a different fruit each time. But it's hard to be tempted away from the regular menu, especially when it offers dishes like the *Banana or Pineapple Flambé*, sautéed with *Grand Marnier* and served with vanilla ice-cream!

And as an extra attraction to the restaurant, as if excellent food and great service weren't enough already, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays there's Thai dancing too! It starts at 8:30 pm and features several talented Thai artists who perform a different show each time. And with over 50 sets in their repertoire, you'll never see the same show twice.

So, finally, what does all this cost? And the answer to that is – ‘Not a lot!’ You'll certainly get a shock when the bill arrives, but it'll be a very pleasant one.

*Pisces '99* is open every day from 3:00 pm – 11:00 pm. For reservations or further information, telephone 0 7741 3466.



# A Special Night Out at Poppies



Which category do you fit into? Are you one of those people who 'eats to live', or do you enjoy the gastronomic pleasures of life, and 'live to eat'? If you fall into the latter group read on, because Poppies will be of particular interest to you. When local and foreign residents are asked to recommend a restaurant for quality food, excellent service and great ambience, Poppies is always high on the list.

Opened in south Chaweng 7 years ago, Poppies is the namesake of its sister hotel in Bali, which has been successfully operating for 29 years. This popular boutique resort has just 24 Thai style cottages set amongst Samui's finest landscape gardens.

A winding pathway leads you from the marble lobby at the hotel's entrance passing waterfalls, over bridges and lily-covered fish ponds to the Thai pavilion restaurant near the beach.

The open-air pavilion can seat 40 diners. Sixty more places are available for those who prefer to be on the beachside terrace under the palm trees or next to the floodlit free form pool with its trickling cascades. Wherever you sit, the restaurant with its soft lighting and gardens has a magical warm feeling.

Discreet entertainment is provided by Mr. Pino, an Italian born musician, who plays Spanish and Classical Guitar on Tuesdays, Thursdays & Fridays. Rudi plays standards and favourites on piano on Sundays & Mondays. Thai Classical music is performed on Wednesdays. The highlight of the week is Saturday's Thai Night. Local musicians play authentic Thai music and Thai dancers perform in traditional costume. Local artisans are on hand to demonstrate their skills in soap carving, artwork and cookery.

So with the perfect setting and ambience, what about the main reason for



being there – the food? Is it any good? Well it should be! Poppies have two top quality chefs in their kitchen. The executive chef *Jan Hollister*, a Los Angeles born American who has been with Poppies for a year now. He loves Samui as it allows him to specialize in fresh seafood. Jan insists on using local produce and enjoys cooking in a western style with Thai ingredients. Try his *Green-lip Mussels and Local Fish in light coconut broth with black rice*. Freshness is the order of the day, and each evening Jan presents a selection of special dishes using only the highest quality fresh produce from the local market available that morning.

“... Jan loves Samui for it allows him to specialise in fresh seafood, which he complements with soups, appetizers, sauces and special daily creations.”

And then there's the in-house Thai chef – *Khun Wantanee Panplum*, who has been with the hotel since opening. For a great introduction to Thai cuisine try her '*Kantoke*'. This is a Thai set-dinner for 2, offering a selection of dishes served on a rattan tray. There's a seafood version, and a vegetable one too, but here's the '*Traditional Kantoke*' set dinner – just to get your mouth watering! *Charcoal duck roasted curry, spicy prawn soup with lime leaf, fried chicken with ginger, stir-fried morning glory, deep-fried prawn cake with plum sauce and jasmine steamed rice*. All that for just 850 Baht for 2 people!

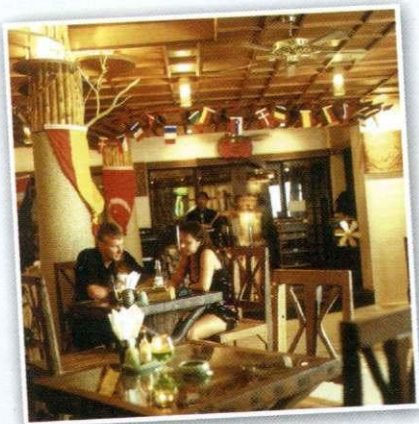
Poppies has a completely separate luncheon menu with the emphasis on 'lighter' cuisine, such as exotic fresh salads, pastas and Thai favourites. Lunch is served from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm daily.

A few lucky customers do manage to get a dinner table immediately without booking, but to avoid disappointment, reservations are definitely recommended.

Telephone 0 7742 2419  
for bookings and  
further information.



# A Complete Night-Out at Red Snapper



It's common in Europe and America to have a 'complete night-out' at a restaurant. Dinner, live entertainment and even dancing. But when you come over to Samui, you normally have to split the evening's elements into two or three stages.

And this is when a place that does offer these amenities all together becomes an extremely attractive option.

One such place is *Red Snapper*. It's all very well providing these services, but the real question is: 'What's it like?' Does Red Snapper provide the 'complete night-out' that we've come to expect in the western world? There was only one way for me to find out, and that meant treating my wife to a night on the town!

The restaurant is a part of *Chaweng Regent Beach Resort* - one of Chaweng's top resort/hotels - so we had every right to expect something special. And being on Chaweng Beach Road itself, just 200 metres north of *Starbucks Coffee*, meant that there was no problem finding it.

Red Snapper has an attractive entrance, with its own bakery selection on one side, and as we entered, a cool breeze immediately met us. Quite a relief from the humid air outside. But it wasn't cold, like some air-conditioned places can be. Here, they have an open front, allowing the fresh and conditioned air to mix. Perfect!

There's only seating for 50, so the atmosphere is pleasantly intimate, without being crowded. And the tables are set spaciouly apart on one side of the restaurant, next to the dance floor in front of the band, with a bar on the other side. The décor has a nautical theme, with plenty of pot plants, and Mexican touches here and there (Red Snapper is a Tex-Mex restaurant after all!).

We arrived at 8:15 pm (it's open from 11:00 am - 1:00 am) and



settled ourselves down with the jazzy menu. There's a particularly large snacks and starters section. Great if you're there just for a few drinks enjoying the music and feeling peckish. But we were there trying each and every part of the menu, not just topping up our appetites!

And what better way of starting, than trying the *Texas Torpedoes* - deep-fried jalapeno peppers stuffed with cream cheese and served with homemade chili, cilantro & lime jelly; and the *Jumbo Prawns on a Spit* - coated in a secret herb mix, then grilled and served with fresh limes.

"... and it's hard to beat a good meal with live music - especially when the food is this delicious!"

Just as we were commenting on the huge portions of the starters being served, the 3-man *Red Buffalo Band* started up (they play almost continuously from 8:30pm - midnight). And what a sheer delight they were to listen to! They kept us spellbound throughout the evening with songs from the seventies through to the nineties.

It's hard to beat a good meal with live music - especially when the food is this delicious!

Next, it was time for the main course. For me, the *Famous Pork Rib Dinner* - a whole rack of baby back-ribs, slow-roasted and coated with Red Snapper's original BBQ sauce. And to steal a line from a famous, fast-food, franchise, it sure was 'finger licking good'!

My wife chose the *Lone Star Sirloin Steak* - Texan-style (which meant it was HUGE!). She ordered it medium to well-done, and that's exactly how it arrived. And it must have been tasty for she polished it all off with lots of appreciative noises!

Somehow or other, after all that, we put duty first and ordered dessert! A superb *American Apple Pie* with a portion of vanilla ice-cream for me, and a melt-in-the-mouth *Lime Cheesecake* for my wife. And there was only one thing left to do after making our way though the mountain of food we'd eaten - and that was to dance some of it off!

So that was how we spent the rest of the evening, along with a drink or two!

And the verdict? Well, it really was the complete night out that we were hoping for - and at a very reasonable price!

For reservations or further information,  
telephone 0 7742 2008.



# The Perfect Lunch at Reef Café



'The Perfect Lunch?' I know there's no such thing as a *free* lunch, but what about a *perfect* one? Is there somewhere on Samui that offers that 'Holy Grail' of 'midday gourmets'?

The Reef Café in Central Samui Village had been recommended in this capacity many times, but what's it *really* like? Is it *really* as good as I'm told?

The time had come for me to make a visit, so I waited till a sunny day, then took my wife over there for the afternoon. As an added attraction, Central Samui Village gives non-resident diners free access to all the resort's facilities. And that includes use of its 3 swimming pools (towels are provided too), sunbeds, etc. So, it looked like I was going to get wet – as well as fed!

The resort is just a couple of kilometres west of Hua Thanon, in the south of the island, at Ntien Beach. Follow the signs for the *Butterfly Garden* (also owned by The Central Group) and you'll find it. And it's just two minutes further up the road from *Samui Aquarium and Tiger Zoo*, two more of Samui's major daytime attractions. So, it would seem to be an ideal spot to stop for lunch on a sightseeing day out.

We made our way down the hillside, past bungalows, through gardens and around swimming pools as the panoramic view of the bay opened up. It's very unspoilt here. Like all of Samui was just a few years ago. And there, by the water's edge was Reef Café.

It's large (there's seating for 150), but not apparently so at first glance. There are so many different parts to it, that each section has an intimate feel of its own. A raised terrace by the bar seats 35, then there are two air-conditioned glass-paneled rooms, each accommodating up to 30 diners. But we sat on the spacious, lower terrace with views across to the



neighbouring 'Robinson Crusoe' island of Koh Matsum.

Here we met the charming Food & Beverage Manager – *Khun Manoon Wutti*. He introduced us to our waitress, and when asked, happily recommended several special dishes of the day. Nothing seems to be too much trouble for the staff here!

“... making it an ideal spot to stop for lunch  
on a sightseeing day out.”

The a la carte menu is huge, and extremely tempting! Thai, international, Italian, seafood, etc, etc, etc. It's all here. My wife ordered the *Parma Ham with a trio of Melons and Vintage Port*, while I went for the *Pumpkin Cream Soup complemented by Fresh Sea Scallop*.

The service was swift and friendly, the presentation was exciting and appetising, and the taste was exceptional. Mmm...what to order next? Well normally I pride myself for having original ideas, but when my wife chose the *Basil Marinated and Oven-baked Norwegian Fjord Salmon, served on a Ragout of Creamed Leek*, I just had to order it too. And was very glad I did.

Again, it arrived quickly. And again, it looked absolutely delicious – which it was! The dish is one of the many original creations of Reef Café's new Australian Executive Chef – *Bradley Barrett*. Truly a master of his trade!

My wife knows when 'enough is enough', but I don't. I had the go the whole way and finish with a dessert. And the *Classical Crème Brulee* was the dish that finally did it. But I have no regrets. Superb!

And after lunch? I had a refreshing swim in the butterfly-shaped swimming pool, while my wife went off to be pampered in the resort's luxurious *Centara Spa*. The perfect end to the perfect lunch!

In fact, so good was the lunch, that I reserved our table for dinner there too, but that's another story!

For reservations and further information,  
telephone 0 7742 4020,  
or visit their website:  
[www.centralhotelsresorts.com](http://www.centralhotelsresorts.com)



# Sea Breezes at Ruean Sai Lom



What's in a name? Think of a restaurant called '*Sea Breeze Hut*', and what do you imagine? Something very basic? With little choice on the menu? Well, names can be deceptive, for this is the literal translation of one of Samui's finest eating establishments – *Ruean Sai Lom*.

Certainly, it does have sea breezes, being right on the beach at picturesque Choeng Mon. But it's definitely not a hut! In fact, it's part of '*Hotel The White House*', which has been renowned for its quality and style since its opening in 1994. Impeccable design combined with luxurious use of flowers, fabrics and stone do make you '*feel like a president*', as their advertising brochures claim.

And it's this unashamed splendour that continues from the lobby, through the small resort and down to Ruean Sai Lom. The restaurant is idyllically placed between a classically designed swimming pool, lined with terra-cotta friezes, and the magnificent beach itself.

It's very spacious here with generous amounts of room for the 70 it can comfortably accommodate. The tables are sectioned off from each other by the clever use of drapes and hangings, making the whole affair extremely private. And although '*up-market*', there is no dress code. At one table you'll find shorts and T-shirts worn by a honeymooning couple, while at the next there'll be a group of executives in tuxedos, creating a friendly, bohemian ambience.

And if the sea breezes aren't enough to keep you cool, the ever-swirling overhead fans surely will! The background sounds of Thai music combined with the trickling water of the swimming pool and the gently lapping waves on the shore produce a relaxed, holiday atmosphere. The perfect setting for a meal out.

• Although Ruean Sai Lom specializes in *Thai* and *Seafood*, it has a wide *International* selection too. If you're going there to eat Thai, do try their



delicious *Crispy Seafood Chips*, which taste like spring rolls, but are flat and triangular. Both the *Home-style Curries* (meat or seafood) in coconut-milk with potatoes, and the *Steamed Prawns* in garlic and butter are also recommended for their superb, authentic taste.

I'd prompt seafood lovers towards the *Seafood Basket*, with its succulent mixture of grilled fish, prawns, squid and crabs together with a salad and fried rice, served in a sliced pineapple half. And I'm sure they won't be disappointed!

'...the *Pancake with Coconut Ice-cream* and the *Caramel Custard* come highly recommended, unless, of course, you're on a diet!'

There're pasta, pizzas, and even vegetarian dishes amongst the varied international section of the menu, and they are all excellent. But if pushed to recommend just two, I'd have to go with the *Cordon Bleu* – pork scallop fillet with ham and cheese, and the *Potato Gratin* topped with cheese. Both dishes are cooked to perfection and will have you addicted!

And before I move on to the desserts – a quick mention of the wines on offer. Ruean Sai Lom has a well-stocked cellar, including wines from *Australia, Germany, Italy* and *France*. Their prized exhibit is a *Saint-Emilion Grand Cru Chateau Saint-Lô*, which is a special vintage, bottled in celebration of the *King of Thailand's Golden Jubilee* in 1998. And it does taste as good as it should!

There isn't a large selection of desserts, but what there are, are really good. Both the *Pancake with Coconut Ice-cream* and the *Caramel Custard* come highly recommended, unless, of course, you're on a diet!

The restaurant opens at 10:30 am, which makes it an attractive option for lunch too. Hotel The White House has a great location on Choeng Mon Beach, with the headland of Tongsai Bay and the neighbouring island of Koh Pha-Ngan directly opposite, and a small '*Robinson Crusoe*' island – that you can walk out to – merely 400 metres away. Shower and changing facilities are available for customers.

So, what is in a name? Well, Ruean Sai Lom has certainly made a name for itself on Samui, but the real translation should be '*Superb Restaurant*'!

Ruean Sai Lom is open from 10:30 am – 10:30 pm.

For reservations and further information, telephone 0 7724 5315-7, or see their website [www.samuidreamholiday.com](http://www.samuidreamholiday.com)



# The Genuine Article at Sala Thai



It's spreading! The discovery has been made, and now people can't get enough of it. In fact, the popularity of Thai cuisine has never been greater, with Thai restaurants popping up all over the world. But do they offer the *real* thing? Or do they give you an internationalized version? What they *think* you want?

Well, the joy of being in Thailand itself, is that Thai cuisine is everywhere. But the same problem sometimes remains. You're given the Thai experience they think you're looking for and not the '*genuine article*'.

There is some good news though! Some places *do* provide traditional Thai dining with marvelous, authentic dishes, in beautiful surroundings. And, without a doubt, one of the very best restaurants on Samui, which offers a *true* Thai dining experience is *Sala Thai*, at the prestigious *Santiburi Dusit Resort*.

It's in *Maenam*, which means that if you're staying in busy *Chaweng* or *Lamai*, you have an opportunity to '*get away from it all*' for a night. And it's only 15 minutes away by car from *Chaweng*, so you don't have to spend half the evening traveling either.

The whole Thai experience starts before you even reach *Sala Thai* restaurant, so try to take it all in. As you wander through the hotel lobby, you'll see many fine examples of traditional Thai décor. And most days there'll be a local Thai artisan displaying her skills of carving fresh fruit and vegetables into flower designs. Certainly worth watching her dexterity for a minute or two.

Carry on to the left, and you'll be at *Sala Thai*'s individual lobby, where again, there are many interesting items, including some of the very colourful face masks used in traditional Thai dancing (there are dance shows three days a week at the restaurant, so check beforehand if you'd particularly like to see one).

On entering *Sala Thai* you'll be greeted by one of the many extremely-polite Thai staff, each dressed in the most beautiful, traditional, silk uniform. They'll give you the customary Thai '*wai*' greeting, before leading you through, adding to the



authentic atmosphere of a real Thai dining experience.

And next it's decision time. Whether to eat in the wood-paneled, air-conditioned part of the restaurant, with its floor-to-ceiling panoramic glass windows, or on the outside terrace with its views across the adjacent lily-covered pond and fountain, through to the lake-sized swimming pool beyond.

Both are equally comfortable, with elegant granite-topped tables, and rattan & wrought-iron chairs, so the decision must depend upon your preference for warm tropical nights, or for a cooler climate. Wherever you choose, the service and food will be the same – outstanding!

“...and Sala Thai is one of the very best restaurants on Samui offering a *true* Thai dining experience.”

And within minutes of selecting your appetizer and main-course from the carved wooden menus, a daily ‘taster’ is presented. A typical example is the *Ka Toong Thong with Miang Cam*, which is a bite-sized pastry-crust filled with a mixed salad of herbs, nuts and dried prawns, topped with a sweet sauce. And it certainly wakes up the taste-buds for the *real* appetizers.

The *Sala Thai Ton Sum Ruhb* is a selection of several starter dishes including a delicious *Satay Yang* – grilled pork and chicken satays, and *Por Pia Pak Kab Goong* – fried vegetable and prawn spring rolls, and it's a good choice if you're not sure what to order. Other recommendations are the *Yam Hoa Plee* – banana flower salad, and the famous *Tom Yam Goong* – a spicy Thai herb soup with prawns. Cooked to perfection – Thai-style!

The main courses here are as equally authentic and delicious as the appetizers, and I would personally suggest either the *Nuea Pad Kra Chai* – fried beef in red curry with lesser ginger, or the *Hor Mok Hoy* – steamed scallops in red curry, served in a banana leaf. Both are the ‘*real thing*’, and finding the same quality and authenticity of these dishes elsewhere on Samui is not easy!

Traditional Thai desserts round off the eating experience, and the *Gluay Fak Tong Cheam* – banana and pumpkin in syrup with coconut milk, and the *Kao Neaw Peak Lamyai Rae Pueak* – sticky rice with longan and taro, are both typical examples of the best that's available.

And finally, a word must be said about the presentation. Each and every dish is prepared with such artistry and care, that I'm not surprised to hear that it's actually ‘*Royal Thai Cuisine*’ at Sala Thai. Which makes this traditional dining experience all the richer!

For reservations (which are advisable), and further information, telephone 0 7742 5031.



# The Heart of Gold at Samui Seafood



*Is beauty only skin deep? Or can you judge a book by its cover?* There are plenty of restaurants on Samui that look the part, but are disappointing when it comes to the actual food itself.

Without doubt, one of the island's most spectacularly beautiful restaurants is *Samui Seafood*. But is it merely a façade, or are the contents a true reflection of the marvelous wrapping? I love trying out different restaurants, and I wanted to find out the truth, so took a friend along one night to look behind the outer skin.

And I must say that the restaurant does look absolutely breathtaking. It's on the northern stretch of Chaweng Beach Road, just opposite *Chaweng Regent Beach Resort*, and stands out a mile. The first thing we notice are two ornately painted fishing boats, floating on their own little sea, with their own miniature beach in the foreground. When we take a closer look, we see they're loaded full of ice, with dazzling displays of fresh seafood placed on them. My taste buds are aroused already, and we wander past some tables and chairs nearby, over a rustic wooden bridge towards the interior of the restaurant. We sit next to a fishpond teeming with carp, listening to the relaxing sounds of a huge waterfall cascading down the rocks into it.

There are various floodlights, subtly illuminating the different areas of the restaurant, of which there are many. There are small thatched huts here, terraces there. There's even a sports bar with a pool table. In fact, there are so many places to choose (250 seats!), that the task of picking a table is fun in itself.

And there's traditional Thai entertainment every night from 7:30 – 9:30, alternating between singing, dancing and instrumental music. Great for watching up close, or merely enjoying as a soothing background sound.

So, we have established the fact that Samui Seafood does deserve its reputation for its magical beauty, and now it's time to try what we've come here for – the food!



And it's not all seafood. There's an excellent selection of Thai food too: rice and noodle dishes, salads, curries and more. And should you be feeling like going Latin, the Italian menu would put many Italian restaurants to shame! But tonight we wanted to try the international cuisine, so we selected our starters from the multi-language menu.

“... with the relaxing sounds of a huge waterfall cascading down the rocks.”

I'm a seafood fanatic, so the *Lobster Bisque Cream Soup* immediately appealed. But I'd never seen it served with such originality. The entire bowl was covered by, what appeared to be, a crusty bread roll, but was, in fact, pizza crust. I cut open the top with my knife and instantly knew by the rich aroma that it would taste great, and I was right. My friend opted for a *Caesar Salad* with *Thousand Island* dressing, and she was impressed by its fresh, crispy flavours.

I stayed with seafood and ordered the *King Prawns Thermidor* with butter rice, carrots, corn, beans and asparagus for my main course. I won't mince words, I'll just say it was excellent. And my friend's *Duck Breast Southern Sea*, with roast potatoes and vegetables? Truly superb!

The next decision, with our waistlines in mind, was whether or not to have a dessert. One swift glance at the dessert menu solved our dilemma. I chose the *Tartufo Chocolate Truffle – Zabaglione* ice cream, covered with gianduia ice cream with crushed pralinated hazelnuts & cocoa powder. My friend picked the *Samui Sundae* – two scoops of ice cream, with fresh coconut, almond & chocolate topping. The taste? Well, if we hadn't have been so bloated, we'd have ordered two more!

So, is the beauty of Samui Seafood only skin deep? Definitely not. This restaurant has a heart of gold too!

And it's worth noting that in April this year Samui Seafood received a special award for its '*Outstanding Promotion of Thai Culture*'!

The restaurant is open from  
11:30 am till midnight every day.  
Telephone 0 7741 3221-3  
for reservations and  
further information.



# More Than Just a Meal at SeaQuest Samui



Are you nosey? Or just a little curious? There's a bit of the voyeur in us all. We all like watching what others are doing. And this is no more apparent than when we select somewhere to eat. We like seeing what's going on around us - before, during and after our meal.

And without a doubt, *SeaQuest Samui* is the perfect place for giving people-watchers ample opportunities for doing just that. It's in the middle of the main shopping area on *Chaweng Beach Road* (opposite the *Sport Stadium* retail outlet), spread 20 metres along the pavement, Mediterranean-style, with its own streetlamps. It's even got the green and white umbrellas over each of the outside pinewood tables and chairs, furthering the continental flavour. And all this Gallic influence comes as no surprise when you discover that the owner, manager and head chef are all *French*. But more of that later when I talk about the food.

There's more to *SeaQuest Samui* than just the seating for 50 outside. It has a stylish, rock, glass and chrome interior too, that can accommodate a further 50. And it's all based on a nautical theme, as the name suggests. A captain's wheel here, miniature boats there. And there are some interesting antique items too, like the wood and brass telescope and a shiny old brass diving helmet. But the most fascinating features are the aquaria - they're everywhere! Even the imitation portholes have their own aquarium inside!

And the main aquatic attraction is a small shark (rather like a miniature 'Jaws'), which swims endlessly around in the large aquarium roadside. I don't think he's on the menu, although just about everything else is!

French-food lovers are advised to try the '*Cuisses de Grenouille a la Provençale*' - sautéed frogs' legs with garlic and parsley, as a starter to '*Daube de Boeuf a la Provençale & Pates*' - a beef stew with tomato & olives served with spaghetti for their main course. You won't be disappointed! The '*SeaQuest Pizza*', with tomatoes, shrimps, squid and clams, and the



'Spaghetti au Saumon' with cream, shallots garlic, parsley and olive oil, come thoroughly recommended to gourmets of Italian cuisine. And fish connoisseurs will particularly like the 'Tournedos de Saumon a la Vapeur de Citron Vert' – salmon steak steamed with green lemon. They'll also appreciate the large selection of fresh seafood displayed outside in an ornamental boat.

There's plenty of Thai cuisine to choose from too, and there are also 'Daily Specials', such as a traditional 'English Pork Chop' with gherkins, French fries and tomato sauce. And as if that isn't enough already, SeaQuest Samui provides set-meals too. Whatever meal you choose can be complemented with one of their French wines, of which they stock a wide variety.

"...and French-food lovers are advised to try the  
'Daube de Boeuf a la Provençale & Pates'  
– you won't be disappointed!"

But let's not forget the marvelous desserts served here, and created in-house by the French chef. The 'Crème Brulee' and the 'Profiteroles au Chocolat' are personally recommended and could happily grace any restaurant in the world! And it's also worth noting that SeaQuest Samui boasts of having its very own pastry chef and bakery on the premises too. A glass-fronted counter at the rear of the restaurant displays some of his delicious, freshly-baked cakes and pastries, such as *Lemontart*, *Opera* and *Millefeuille*, so do go over and take a look.

And after having enjoyed an excellent meal in this original 'brasserie', whilst watching the world go by, you can continue the voyeuristic experience by visiting 'Seaquarium' adjacent to the restaurant. For a small charge (special discount for diners) you can wander through the well-kept aquaria and see what all the fish are doing!

And as yet *another* after-dining alternative, you could always go upstairs to the roof-garden 'Neptune Club' spa & gym and work off some of your newly-acquired calories, or have a relaxing massage after all that tiring people-watching!

SeaQuest Samui is open from 9:00 am – 2:00 am. For further information, telephone 0 7742 2653.



# The Ideal Blend at Tamarind



'New' is exciting! It means fresh, different and lively. In fact, the only downside to it, is that it usually comes hand in hand with inexperience, and all that that entails. But on the other side of the coin we have 'old'. Old is safe. Traditional and set in its ways. Rather boring too, sometimes. So, what if someone could combine the best of both elements in a *restaurant*?

Well, *Impiana Resort Samui* has managed to do just that with their amazing, new, fine-dining, beachside *Tamarind* restaurant! Every last piece of the building and décor is brand-new. From the comfortable, padded seating, through to the attractive glazed crockery and elegant silverware, everything gives off a feeling of vibrancy and innovation.

It has an airy splitlevel design, providing sea-views through the swaying palms for each of the fifty diners it seats. 'Spacious' is an understatement when used to describe Tamarind's dimensions. They've resisted the temptation of cramming more tables in, preferring the luxury of lots of room. And what a difference that makes. Subtle spotlighting, and candle-lamps on each table provide the perfect illumination. Bright enough to see what you're eating, without making you feel that you're on-stage performing to the masses!

And, apart from the imaginative use of huge cooking cauldrons and classical urns in its décor, the main interior feature of the restaurant is, without doubt, the cascading waterfall behind the bar area. Not only does it look beautiful under the lighting, but it provides its very own background music too!

So, where does the *old* element come in? Well, apart from the magnificent 150 year-old tamarind tree that dominates the entrance and gives restaurant its name, the highly-trained staff is amongst the most experienced you'll find on Samui, if not in all Thailand! And that starts right at the top with the charming Hotel Manager – *Bernd Schillig* – recently arrived after a long and successful career with an international 5-star hotel group (and a previous President of the *Samui Culinary Circle*), down to the waiting and kitchen staff.

• The Executive Chef – *Darren Ikinpule* – although only 28 years-old, is already an old hand! He was trained in *New Zealand* by the world-famous



Hyatt Group, and selected to represent them on several overseas promotional tours to places like the *Middle East, Taiwan, Taipei and Singapore*. He's now on Samui, producing what he calls: "*Pacific-rim with Asian influence cuisine*". Darren was born and bred in New Zealand, with both parents having their origins deeply-rooted in *Niue*, a small island near to *Tonga and Samoa*. This might explain some of the unique flavours he miraculously conjures up in his dishes!

"...and the presentation of the dishes is impeccable, making cutting into them feel almost sacrilegious!"

Which brings us nicely onto the food. Before the first dish arrives, a complimentary 'taster' is presented, just to whet your appetite. It changes every day, but to give you an example, I had a *Tiger Prawn Wrapped in Snapper Mousse & Wonton Crust* on a wing-bean salad, and it certainly did its job!

Although I could happily recommend every dish on the menu (without exaggeration), space permits me to mention just 2 of each course, starting with the appetizers. Both the *Coconut-smoked Duck Breast* on a pomelo salad with orange peppercorn vinaigrette, and the *Salad of Rock Lobster & Soba Noodles* with seafood laksa and Thai green leaves are absolutely delicious. Their presentation (as with all of Darren's dishes) is impeccable, and makes cutting into them feel almost sacrilegious!

Meat-lovers will appreciate the *Char-grilled Australian Sirloin* resting on a garlic baguette with som tam salad and sticky rice, whilst the fish-food fanatics will surely love the *Pan-seared Fillet of White Snapper* with fresh Vietnamese pohpia of jicama and sweet potato with warm peanut sauce.

To round off this marvelous culinary experience, the *Oven-baked Plantain Banana* with orange caramel and French vanilla ice-cream, or the *Hot Chocolate Cream* complemented by mocha ice-cream are both more than capable of doing just that!

And finally, the wine. Not only does Tamarind stock a good variety of wines from *Australia, Italy, France, South Africa, Chile* and even *Thailand*, but each bottle's qualities are comprehensively described in the wine list, making selection an easy task.

This restaurant is decidedly amongst the best Samui offers, and being just 5 minutes south of Chaweng in Chaweng Noi (on the ring road), makes it easy to reach but away from the madding crowds, and well worth the trip!

Tamarind's kitchen is open  
from 6:00 – 10:30 pm.

For further information and reservations  
(which are advisable),  
telephone 0 7742 2011.



# The Best of All Worlds at The Captain's Choice



Keeping everybody happy is never easy. He prefers to eat Italian. She wants to try the local cuisine, '*We are in Thailand after all!*' And the kids insist on being near the beach. You'd be forgiven for thinking it was an impossible dilemma. And this is where local knowledge really does help.

There are some great Italian restaurants on Samui, but they don't serve gourmet Thai food and they're not on the beach. And there are plenty of excellent Thai restaurants around, but that's all they do serve. In fact there's only one place on the island that manages to offer the very best of both cuisines on their menu, and in an idyllic beach location. And that's *The Captain's Choice* at Imperial Group's flagship resort – *The Imperial Boat House Hotel*. And as it's my job to see if it's as good as people claim, I took my wife there one evening (but not the children this time!) to find out.

We followed the coastroad about five kilometres north of Chaweng and came to the hotel, which is on picturesque *Choeng Mon Beach*. It was easy to spot because it has an authentic, wooden rice-barge moored up outside on the grass. And it's this nautical theme that flows throughout the hotel.

Even the front desk looks like the side of a boat! And it was from here that we headed for the 120-seater, beachside restaurant – *The Captain's Choice*. That gave us the opportunity of wandering through this unique resort and seeing its famous boat accommodation. The hotel has 34 teak-barges that have been imaginatively converted into luxurious 2-storey suites, and they look so inviting!

Next, it was past the massive, boat-shaped swimming pool with water flowing into it from decorative cannons. And finally to the restaurant itself on the water's edge. It's got the ideal location. Just what the travel agents' brochures tempt us with. Waves lapping at the nearby shore. Coconut palms swaying in the breeze. And it faces across a bay with the headland's twinkling lights reflecting over the water. Perfect!

You can choose between sitting in the open-sided elegant restaurant, or on a



spacious, grassy terrace that's spread along the beachfront. It was a warm, clear night so we opted for the great outdoors.

The menus arrived swiftly, and we ordered drinks as we made our choices. Such was the difficulty in selecting from the tempting dishes, we were still deciding when our drinks arrived. But hunger took over and I ordered the *Incontro di Granchio e Aragosta con Insalata di Avocado e Limone* – blue crab and lobster salad with scented lemongrass as an appetizer. And it was even better than I'd hoped!

“... and it faces across a bay with the headland's twinkling lights reflecting over the water. Perfect!”

Meanwhile, my wife had ordered the *Thai Cuisine Tasting Menu* which is an extraordinarily inexpensive set-meal designed by Imperial's Thai Gourmet Chef – Miss Yuan Chai – as a way of introducing Thai food to newcomers. And there seemed no end to it! It started with a *Steamed Barracuda Salad* with ginger sauce, then on to *Coconut Soup* with chicken, lemongrass and galangal. Next it was *Steamed Asparagus* with a crabmeat sauce, *Grilled King Prawn* with a Chinese brandy sauce, *Crispy-fried Butterfish* with a Tamarind sauce, and finally, a *Beef Massaman Curry*, all served with local steamed-rice. And that wasn't all! She got to try a favourite Thai dessert too – *Sweet, Sticky Bananas* in coconutmilk. She loved every morsel, and I can happily announce that Thai cuisine has yet another addict.

I'd carried on my Italian adventure with a mouth-watering *Maccheroni all Crema di Zafferano con Gamberatti e Zucchini* – macaroni with saffron, shrimps and zucchini sauce, followed by a superb *Petto di Pollo alla Crema di Porri* – chicken breast with leek cream sauce. And having the tasty *Pannacotta* with strawberry sauce as a dessert was an ideal way of completing my Italian meal. Excellent.

I even had the chance of thanking the executive chef – Marco Trentin – as I spotted him chatting with some other satisfied diners. He's recently arrived on Samui after spells in Switzerland, New York, Miami, and Phuket, and plans to stay here for quite a while – thankfully!

So, I can definitely say that when you eat at The Captain's Choice, you don't have to make any compromises. They certainly don't.

The restaurant opens at 11:00 am, with the Thai / Italian menu available from 6 – 11:00 pm. For reservations and further information about The Captain's Choice and the Imperial Boat House Hotel, telephone 0 7742 5041.



# Riverside Dining at The Mangrove



What a refreshing change! A brand-new, top-quality Samui restaurant that's NOT on the beach. Neither is it on *Chaweng Beach Road*. And although it's definitely 5-star, it's not part of a resort either. In fact, it's not in Chaweng at all, but only being a 5-minute drive away, it's easy to get to.

So where is it? Well, its name – *The Mangrove* – may have already given away its location, for it's idyllically situated on the banks of a sea-water river lined with beautiful mangroves. But what makes this restaurant so special? Apart from its unique setting?

Well, the answer to that is – everything! But let's talk a bit more about the location and the restaurant building itself. The Mangrove is a hundred metres to the right along the road leading from *Big Buddha* to *Samui Airport* (making it an ideal spot for stopping at before catching a flight - they'll take care of your luggage too). It's opensided, allowing the cool river breezes to keep it pleasantly airy. There's not a mosquito in sight either (they don't like salt-water!), so it's mercifully bug-free too. A wide, wooden terrace area overlooks a mangrove plantation growing along the riverside (it's all wonderfully floodlit at night), while a spacious, terra-cotta tiled interior has both garden and river views. But above all else, there's lots of space. There's seating for 32 at The Mangrove – but room for 50!

Attention has been paid to every artistic detail here. Huge oriental pots, festooned with colourful displays of tropical flowers. Sprays of local orchids on every table. Menu boards and drinks lists handmade from Thai paper, matching the overhanging ceiling lanterns. And the attention to detail isn't *only* artistic. The service is extraordinarily thoughtful too.

After ordering your starter, a plate of the daily appetizers will miraculously appear. And after you finish your main course, a fragrant cold towel is instantly there. Have a coffee after your meal and homemade biscuits arrive too. And



before you leave, a complimentary liqueur (again homemade) is placed in front of you. But let's go back to the food for a moment.

The dinner menu changes on a 2-3 week basis. And although it's not extensive, the dishes offered cover a wide range of tastes. Here are a few examples from a recent selection to give you an indication of what you can expect: *Green Asparagus with Smoked Salmon and Egg 'Mimosa'*; *Grilled Barracuda Mousse* with fresh tomato-basil sauce; *White Snapper Tournedos* with *Smoked Duck Breast*, red wine sauce and mashed potato; *Boneless Lamb 'Jarret'* served with raisin cous-cous, almond flakes and vegetables au jus; *Caramelized Chicken Leg* stuffed with black mushroom mousse and cream sauce. And complementing this delicious selection is a wine list including bottles from *France, South Africa, Australia and Italy*.

"... for it's idyllically situated on the banks of a sea-water river lined with beautiful mangroves."

But take great care that you don't become addicted to the homemade crusty bread piled up in baskets that arrive on every table. You simply **MUST** leave room for the desserts, as they're really special too. And, unlike the rest of the menu, these don't change – thankfully! There's *Nougat Ice-cream*; *Caramelized Pineapple with Vanilla Ice-cream*; *Crème Caramel*; *Soft Chocolate Cake*, and one that includes each of the above – *The Mangrove Delight*.

And the people behind this refreshingly different restaurant are – *Yannick Tirbois* – a widely-experienced *Master French Chef*, and his partner – *Ilse Dumont* – who has a successful 5-star hotel background (and, incredibly, she speaks 5 languages: *Flemish, French, English, German and Italian*). No wonder the food is excellent and the service so professional. What I can't understand is how they manage to keep the prices so reasonable. The Mangrove really does offer terrific value for money and shouldn't be missed!

The restaurant is open for dinner from 5:30 pm.

Please note that The Mangrove is closed for the last 3 days of each month.

(A minibus/taxi service is available for returning you to your hotel.)

For reservations and more information, telephone 0 7742 7584 or 0 1370 7716.



# A Touch of Style at Upstairs



*Chic* is a lovely word. The only trouble is that it's been grossly overused. It gets coupled to any old establishment these days, purely to add some exotic interest. Which makes life difficult for me when trying to sum up this particular restaurant in a nutshell. I'll tell you about the place first, then I'll see if another word springs to mind.

*Upstairs*, as the name implies, is not a ground floor restaurant. It's immediately above the locally renowned – *Oriental Gallery* – an art and artifact showroom, and sister restaurant. In fact they have a good working relationship; *Upstairs'* diners wanting Thai food can order from a selection of *Oriental Gallery's* menu, and vice versa with *Upstairs'* international cuisine.

What makes this restaurant so absolutely different from any other on Samui, and many other places too, is its unusual but beautiful décor. It was actually featured in both *Home & Décor* and *World of Interiors* magazines, to name but two, for its superb interior – and I'm hardly surprised! There are so many individual touches of pure style and class that it's difficult to describe, and do it justice. What I can say though is that the atmosphere is warm, friendly, fun and exciting; the ambience mellow and engaging. There's enough room up here for many more than the seating for 62, making it spacious and sumptuous.

And not only is the food exceptional, but it's presented in such a stylish way too. I was eating there with a friend and both of us were very hungry, so we started with *Hors D'oeuvres*. *Chicken Liver Pate* with brandy and caramelized onions on a crouton, and the *Goats Cheese Soufflé*, served on a bed of salad with an aioli dip, were as good as they sound.

There are many interesting main courses on the board-style menu, and the *Chicken Kiev* on a bed of spinach, roasted pepper dressing & potato



wedges, and the *Lamb Fillet & Balsamic Medallions* – grilled imported tenderloin medallions with balsamic gravy, steamed broccoli & potato wedges, seemed like good dishes to judge whether the international chef here can serve the 'real thing' or just local substitutes. Well I can happily announce that they are as good as any I've tasted, and they are my particular favourites!

My companion is a seafood lover, so went for *Lobsters on the Rocks*. This consists of 2 rock lobsters, one Thermidor and the other with a lemongrass & white wine sauce, served with creamed potatoes. Lucky he was so hungry! And the taste? Great!

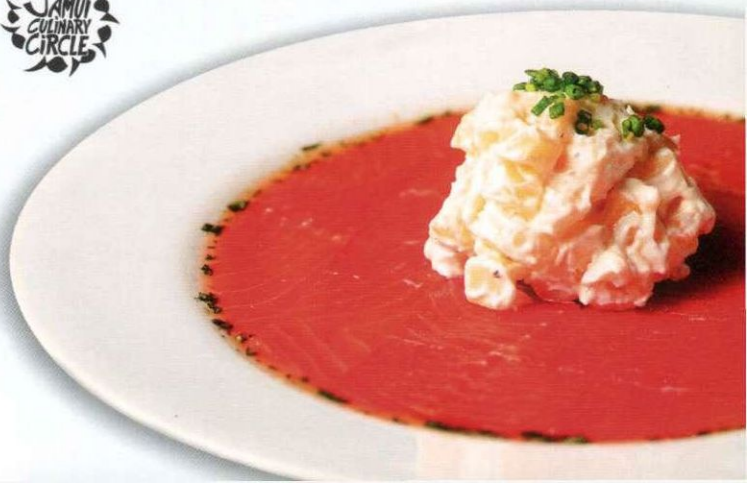
"... It was actually featured in both *Home & Décor*,  
and *World of Interiors* magazines  
for its superb interior – and I'm hardly surprised!"

But it was the dessert that especially attracted me. Having seen the *Homemade Chocolate Truffles* – one dark chocolate & brandy truffle with walnut garnish and one white chocolate & rum truffle heading the menu, I didn't look any further. I've heard people sometimes say, 'That tasted just like my mother's cooking,' but I never believed them. Well this time it was true.

The restaurant's full title is: '*Upstairs Restaurant and Lounge*', which means that you don't have to go there just for the food. And at around 10:00 pm the atmosphere takes on a cocktail club/wine bar feel (no techno/house here!), which makes it an ideal place to stop off for a few drinks after a meal before heading on to a club. The happy hour from 10:30 till 12:00 pm makes it even more attractive!

So did I come up with another suitable word – other than *chic* – to sum up Upstairs? I'm sorry, I'm afraid I couldn't. But when using the word to describe this restaurant, it's *Chic* with a capital C.

The kitchen at Upstairs is open from 12:00 noon till 11:00 pm, but their doors are open till late. For more information telephone 0 7742 2200.



# A Taste of Naples at Vecchia Napoli



Sorry – no hamburgers here. No Thai food either. Nor Mexican, French, German or Japanese. But what there is at Vecchia Napoli is 100% homemade, *real* Italian cuisine.

Is it any good though? I'd heard favourable reports but had never actually been there myself – until now.

Vecchia Napoli isn't directly on the Chaweng Beach Road, but lays 100 metres off it, behind *Starbucks Coffee*, on the lane down to *The Club*. This distance, albeit short, makes all the difference between noisy & dusty, and quiet & clean.

And from the minute you enter the 66-seater restaurant – you're in Italy! Italian music, fine prints on the walls of Naples 100 years ago, the melodic accent of Italian diners chatting, and the appetizing aroma of Italian cooking wafting from the kitchen.

My wife and I are greeted by owner and chef *Francesco*, himself a proud Neapolitan as you may have guessed! He opened Vecchia Napoli in 1990, after working for many years as a chef in Europe. He's fluent in 4 languages, and has an understanding of several others – but prefers to let his cooking do the talking. Which is why we are here!

And what better way to start, than by ordering some food. My diet tells me I should try the *Insalata Vesuvio* – a mixed salad with tuna fish, French beans and boiled egg. But my stomach disagrees and wants to go for the *Carpaccio Bellavista* – thinly-sliced, raw beef filet with pieces of Parmesan cheese, olive oil and lemon. My stomach wins, in more ways than one. This is one very good carpaccio.

My wife is a seafood fanatic, and also likes soup, so the *Zuppa di Crostacei* seemed the perfect choice of starter. It's a shellfish soup containing king prawns, fresh crab, mussels & clams served on a slice of homemade



bread, to soak up some of the succulent juice. All prepared in traditional Neapolitan style. And the verdict? Wow!

And now – it's pasta time. I can always start my diet tomorrow! As a child, I always used to love tinned ravioli, so I went for *Ravioli al Pomodoro & Basilico* – homemade ravioli, filled with ricotta cheese & spinach in tomato sauce. But it didn't taste anything like the tinned stuff – I'm glad to say. This was truly delicious.

“... with the appetizing aroma of Italian cooking wafting from the kitchen.”

One of Francesco's specialties is the *Cannelloni Gratinati* – homemade noodles, filled with ricotta cheese & spinach, oven baked with more cheese. And having tried it, my wife now has *another* favourite dish. But we couldn't come to Vecchia Napoli and not try any of their pizzas, so we ordered a *Pizza Napoli* – with tomatoes, anchovies, olives, oregano and garlic. And were very glad we did. You can't beat a homemade Italian pizza, especially when it tastes as good as this.

A meal wouldn't be complete without a dessert, so I forced myself to try the *Coppa all' Amaretto* – one scoop chocolate, one scoop vanilla ice cream, and one hazelnut topped with a dash of Amaretto, whipped cream and chocolate sauce. I couldn't think of a better way to end a lovely Italian meal, but my wife could. She went for the homemade *Tiramisu* and swears it's the best she's tasted!

But let's not forget the coffee. Italian, of course, like all the wines here. The *Cappuccino* had just the right amount of froth to it, a perfect sprinkling of cinnamon, and went down a treat! Italians sure do know how to make a good cup of coffee.

So, is Vecchia Napoli any good though? Well, in all honesty I don't think the word 'good' is a fair assessment of what they offer. I would be more inclined to say 'exceptional'!

For reservations and further information,  
telephone 0 7723 1229.



# It's Carnival Time at, Zico's



It's fabulous! It's fun! And at the time of writing, it hasn't even opened yet! So how can I possibly recommend it? How can I be so sure that it will be one of the most exciting restaurants on Samui? Well, that's easy. I know who's creating it, and what'll be on offer, down to the very last detail.

In February 2003, *Central Samui Beach Resort* will proudly open the doors to the biggest sensation that the island's restaurant and nightlife scene has experienced since the *Reggae Pub* began playing western hits for Samui backpackers around 15 years ago. It's on *Chaweng Beach Road* opposite the resort, it's *Brazilian*, it's up-market, it's sumptuous, it's lively, it's *Zico's*!

And there's a lot more to this 150-seat restaurant than just a catchy name. Firstly the food. Although there's an interesting a la carte menu, with dishes such as: *Churrasco de Peru com Bacon* – slow char-roasted chunks of U.S. turkey wrapped in lean bacon; and – *Carioca Salmon* – a Tasmanian wedge of deep-sea salmon, pierced with lime leaves and wrapped in Thai chili marmalade, *Zico's* is predominantly a barbecue restaurant. But that's barbecue Brazilian-style!

You'll be able to see 15 different varieties of meat revolving on spits in the 'show' kitchen, and then it's fun-time, because the waiters are 'Passador's, or roving waiters. And they're continually circulating around the restaurant, carving directly to your plate. But how do they know who wants topping up? That's easy too. All diners have a roulette-style disc, green one side, red the other. Place the green side up, and the passadors will be straight over. Show the red side and you'll be left alone, until you turn it back to green of course!

And it's not just meat that comes around. There're vegetables too. And sauces, and bread. For your salad, you'll have to get up. But you'll certainly



feel it was worth the effort when you see the incredible 50-item salad bar in front of you. And while you're on your feet, you may want to choose your wine from the walk-in wine cellar, where there'll be a complete range of excellent world-wide wines, including some South American favourites from Chile and Argentina.

Desserts are a la carte, and include temptations such as the *Pudim de Leite* – a Rio-recipe 'creme caramel' with coconut, and the *Mousse de Castanhas de Caju e Chocolate* – a rich chocolate mousse with caramelized cashew nuts. You won't be leaving here hungry!

“... so you'll be forgiven should you get into the party mood yourself and join in the dancing!”

So, what's the décor like? Contemporary Brazilian. Sumptuous with the accent on comfort. Chandeliers here, sofas there, romantic alcoves, underlit glass flooring, waterfalls, and lots and lots of plants. There's a choice between sitting outside in the 90-seater open-sided patio area where the fresh air mixes perfectly with the air-conditioning, or in the glass-enclosed fully air-conditioned interior which can comfortably accommodate a further 60. A mezzanine-level bar area even has a bank of TVs, and non-diners are more than welcome to come and join in the fun (the full name of the restaurant is *Zico's Brazilian Grill & Bar* after all).

And I've saved the most exciting part till last – the entertainment. Central have spared no expense in this department either, for they've flown in *Quarteto Brasil*, an electrifying 4-piece band, and the *Carnival Queen* dancers all the way from South America. Like the roving passadors, they'll be moving around the restaurant, bringing the action to every table. The beat will be samba, the dancing rhythmic and engaging, and the whole atmosphere will be carnival. And you'll be forgiven should you get into the party mood yourself and join in the dancing!

This is the only review that I've ever written before the restaurant has actually opened, and having read it, I can't wait to go there as soon as it does!

Zico's is open from 5:30 pm – 1:00 am.

For reservations and further information, telephone 0 7723 0500.



# Learning the Secrets at SITCA



It serves 5-star dishes. But it's not a restaurant. Having visited here, you'll take away more than a full stomach and a happy experience. And you'll see every stage of the culinary process, from the preparation of ingredients – to the cooking itself. In fact, you'll be the chef!

The *Samui Institute of Thai Culinary Arts* opened in Chaweng 3 years ago, and has gone from strength to strength ever since. It's a cooking school specializing in teaching the hidden skills of Thai cuisine, and the unique art of fruit and vegetable carving. And *SITCA's* become so renowned, that even the mighty BBC featured it on one of their holiday programmes!

I wanted to see if they could manage to teach me, a person who finds it troublesome frying an egg, so I enrolled for an evening dinner lesson (with much encouragement from my wife!). It's open from Monday to Saturday for lunch classes from 11:30 am – 12:30 pm, and dinner classes from 4:00 – 6:00 pm. Every day there're different menus, so it was simply a matter of choosing the day with my favourite dishes.

So, Wednesday it was. *Deep-fried spring rolls*, *Penang Curry with Chicken* (homemade *Penang Curry-paste*), and *Chicken in Coconut Milk Soup*. Sound good?

*SITCA* is located at the far end of *Soi Colibri* (Chaweng Boulevard), one of two streets found directly opposite *Central Samui Beach Resort*. I arrived promptly at 4:00 pm and was greeted by the owner, and chief cooking instructor – *Roongfa Sringam* – or 'Roong' for short. She's delightful, and cheerfully introduced me to the other members of the dinner class.

Each was here for a different reason: one who thought it was about time to vary her diet from restaurant food, take-aways, and cheese on toast; another loves hosting dinner parties so was joining the class, wishing to extend his



repertoire; and then there was a German couple who hoped to include some Thai dishes on the menu at their restaurant in Hamburg. So, as you can see, a mixed assortment of people, and a wide range of motives for being here.

And before Roong put us in our places to start, I glanced up at an impressive collection of awards and diplomas, proudly displayed along the wall. All attained by Roong and SITCA for their many achievements in the culinary field. The latest being a letter of gratitude from the *other* CIA – the *Culinary Institute of America*. Roong went to New York in May in 2001, where she passed on the skills of Thai fruit and vegetable carving to a massive audience of American chefs. Nice to know we were in such good hands!

“... and SITCA's become so renowned, that even the mighty BBC featured it on one of their holiday programmes!”

Around a large table, we were next introduced to the ingredients for each dish. Then it was clearly explained how each item should be cut, mashed or mixed, and most importantly – why they should be treated that way. I'd always been slightly ham-fisted when it came to slicing vegetables, but when Roong explained the knack, it suddenly became an easy task.

After the preparation of each dish, we were ushered into the adjoining cooking area. Here, lined up at our individual gas-burners, we followed Roong's instructions on everything from the heat of the flame, to the length of time to cook; when to add each item and how to stir or turn it in the wok or pan. And at all times, there were helper's hands removing used pots and providing the utensils required for the next stage.

This was the pattern for each dish, until eventually we were sat back at the table with all our culinary efforts in front of us – ready for the biggest test of all. The tasting! And not just by us students. Our partners were invited to join us at this stage, to enjoy (hopefully) a three-course meal. And my wife's verdict? She didn't believe that I'd cooked it. What greater praise could there be for SITCA!

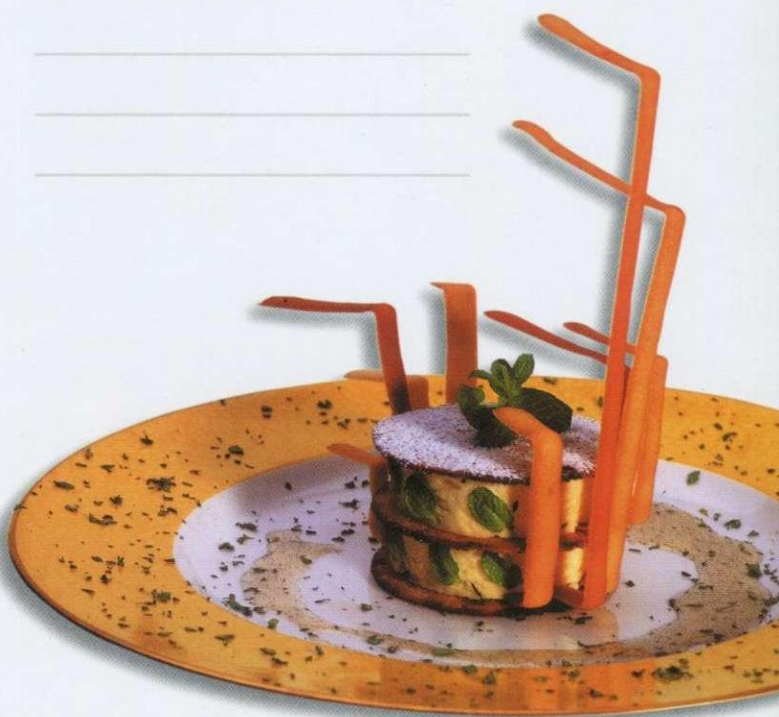
For class reservations and more information about the cooking and fruit & vegetable courses, call into SITCA, telephone 0 7741 3172 or 0 1970 7497, or visit their website: [www.sitca.net](http://www.sitca.net)



# A Space for

## Notes





We hope that *Samui Dining Guide* has been of benefit to you in its recommendations and reviews of the island's premier restaurants.

If you have discovered other quality eating establishments you feel should also be recommended and included in this publication, or would like to make any comments about the ones reviewed, we would be very pleased to hear from you at the address below.

Editor: Steve Taylor

Photographer: Wachara Kireewong

Managing Director: Henrik Bjørk

**Siam Map Company Ltd.**

46/30 Chaweng Boulevard, Moo 3,

Bo Phut, Samui, 84320, Thailand

Tel: (66) 0 7742 2201, Fax: (66) 0 7741 3523

email: [info@siamdiningguide.com](mailto:info@siamdiningguide.com)

[www.siamdiningguide.com](http://www.siamdiningguide.com)

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• Mercure Resort

Flamingo  
Cotto Maltese

Budsaba  
Muang Kulaypan

Meranté Restaurant  
Amari Palm Reef Resort

Laguna Terrace  
Blue Lagoon

The Island Resort

Red Snapper  
Chaweng Regent Beach Resort

Chaweng Villa Beach Resort

Samui Seafood

Churrasco Steak House

Baan Thai

Vecchia Napoli

La Taverna

Baan Chaweng Resort

Panviman

Anchor House Bungalows

SeaQuest Samui

Chaweng Buri

Baan Samui Resort

La Brasserie

Chaweng Beachcomber

Banana Fan Sea Beach Resort

Central Bay Resort

Captain Kirk  
Chez Andy

Oriental Gallery  
Upstairs

Osteria

Zico's

Colibri

Betelnut

Pisces '99

SITCA

Noori India

Hagi

Central Samui Beach Resort

Poppies Restaurant

Poppies

Samui Resotel

First Resort

Fair House Beach Resort

New Star

The Imperial Samui Hotel

Tamarind

Impiana Resort Samui

Chaweng  
Beach

Chaweng Noi  
Beach

North





Siam Map Company Ltd.

46/30 Chaweng Boulevard, Moo 3, Bo Phut,  
Samui, 84320, Thailand

Tel: (66) 0 7742 2201, Fax: (66) 0 7741 3523

email: [info@siamdiningguide.com](mailto:info@siamdiningguide.com)

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